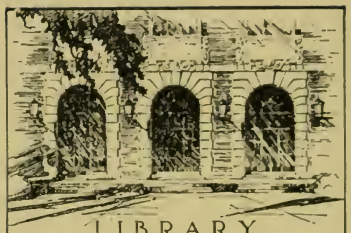

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"CHERRY RIPE!"

A Romance.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"COMIN' THRO' THE RYE," "THE TOKEN OF THE SILVER LILY."

"Could ye come back to me, Douglas, Douglas,
In the old likeness that I knew,
I could be so loving, so tender and true,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true."

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

Third Edition.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.
1878
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"CHERRY RIPE!"

BOOK II.

FRUIT.

CHAPTER I.

"AT BIGNON'S."

"Whoso encamps
To take a fancied city of delight,
O! what a wretch is he! and, when 'tis his
After long toil and suffering, to miss
The kernel of his hopes, how more than vile!"

"FOR what we are going to receive," said Mignon distinctly, with folded hands, "the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen."

The superb and benign Henri, who himself condescended to remove the cover from the

soup, all used to English folks and ways as he was, turned aside to avoid a smile. One or two pretty, frail Americans, dining at adjacent tables with their husbands, looked quickly up, interested and amused. A young *mademoiselle,* who dined alone, with perfect unconcern and serious gravity (for to the true *Parisienne* her dinner is every whit as solemn, and exacts quite as much discrimination as does her *toilette*), shrugged the shoulders that are to a Frenchwoman what a fan is to a Spaniard, the gesture saying as plain as it could speak, "What can you expect from '*une Anglaise*'?" *Monsieur,* eating slowly and heedfully, for to dine at Bignon's every day comes not to the average Frenchman, regarded the English girl, firstly with grave deliberation, lastly, and by successive stages, with warm and candid approval. Probably no man on earth is a better judge of a woman's looks than he; his judgment is never given until he has carefully and conscientiously examined the object of his criti-

cism from head to foot. Led away by no fascination of glance, or fugitive richness of colouring, he will permit no detail of either face, figure, or style to escape him ; and when he has noted all, from the fashion of her hair to the set of her gown and the shape of her foot, he will be in a position to tell you whether by one hair's-breadth she falls short of absolute excellence, or is perfect at all points. In the latter case, he is capable of appreciating her more thoroughly than would any other man of any other nationality under the sun.

Adam, his soup finished, looked across at Mignon, who, in her white gown with its black ribbons, had nothing whatever in face, look, or manner to lead one to suppose she was married, save the plain gold ring and keeper on her little hand.

To his surprise she was looking at him. . . It was but rarely, indeed, that he was able to win her full regard. The old fearless gaze had died out of her eyes since her marriage,

her glance ever turned aside from meeting his, as though she were frightened or ashamed . . . . but now he was quick to note how a tinge of colour had stolen into those snow-white cheeks, how a ripple of laughter trembled upon her lips, and how for the first time in all the past fortnight she seemed, for the moment at least, so exhilarated by the novelty and gaiety of the scene about her as absolutely to have *forgotten*.

"You like it?" he said. "You are glad that we came, Mignon?"

"Yes, indeed!" she said. "It is delightful—ever so much pleasanter than dining in our own rooms, with nobody in the world to look at but one another and Alphonse."

"He is, at any rate, more merciful to our nerves than are these *garçons*," said Adam calmly. "If the equanimity with which every one endures the noises made by himself were not an established fact, what terrible lives these fellows would lead!"

"No doubt if we waited upon *them* they

would suffer as much at our hands as we do at theirs," said Mignon gaily; "but I am quite willing to put up with all their crashes if you will bring me here again to-morrow?"

"Of course we will come again," he said, "if you wish it."

"We will dine at quite a fashionable hour," cried Mignon, "eight o'clock, exactly the time that I used to go to bed at Rosemary until I was fifteen, and I will order the dinner and the wines and the liqueurs, and everything! And just you see," she added triumphantly, "if I don't manage to spend just as much money on it as *you* would!"

"Only I am afraid you would come to grief over the *menu*," said Adam, laughing; "for you know, Mignon, that though Mdlle. Lacroix reckoned you her best French scholar, you do not always call things and persons by their right names, and it was only this afternoon that you wounded the feelings of our driver by addressing him as '*cochon*'!"

"*Anybody* might make such a mistake as

that!" said Mignon, with dignity. "It is perfectly ridiculous that any language should have two words so wonderfully alike—and I shall always think that I know as much real French as you do—only *you* have got all the accent, while I have none!"

"Have you not?" said Adam, gravely. "Now do you know, Mignon, that I should have said you had a great deal! For instance, when you went into that shop this afternoon, and asked for a box of *A. Pangles*——"

"At any rate," said Mignon, with red cheeks, "I got what I wanted; they understood me *perfectly!* Whereas if *you* had gone in, you would have put so much fine accent and so little sense into the request, that very likely you would not have got them at all!"

"In short," said Adam, seriously, "we make one excellent French scholar between us; but, like the two-headed nightingale, it would be death to separate us."

"If it came to translating a page of

Télémaque," said Mignon, nodding wisely, "I know which would get the best of it; some day we'll try."

Télémaque. . . . how the familiar name sent his thoughts travelling backwards. . . . Mignon must have been a baby in arms when he was studying his.

"Adam," she said, dropping her voice to a discreet whisper, "have I got a large black on my nose?"

"No!"

"Nor a crooked parting" (she had removed her hat), "nor—nor anything remarkable, nothing one way or the other to make a person *keep on* staring at me?"

Adam looked across at the winsome English face, that in the streets, the public promenades, the theatres (wherever, indeed, it appeared), drew all eyes after it as the sun does the flowers, and wondered in his heart how much longer she would retain that rarest and most priceless crown of beauty—unconsciousness.

"No," he said, "I don't see anything amiss with you. Why?"

"Would you mind very much if I were to *make a face* at somebody?" she said, still disregarding his question.

"I should mind it very much indeed!" he said hastily. "What on earth can make you wish to do that, Mignon?"

"Because there is a rude man who has done nothing but stare at me since he came in—and a moment ago he deliberately *smiled* at me!"

"Did he indeed?" said Adam, smiling himself; "never mind, dear, don't look at him."

"But he is sitting just behind you," she said, frowning, "and every time I look at you I can't help seeing *him!*"

"Then you must not look at me!" he said, leaning forward, as though the direction taken by his own looks formed no part of the agreement.

She was holding a rich red strawberry to the still riper, sweeter fruit of her pouting

lips, and as he looked, a dimple in one cheek peeped suddenly out like a truant schoolboy, then seeming to repent of its sally, went in again.

"But supposing I like to look at you?" she said. In her fresh, clear young voice was neither falter nor sign of hesitation. The tone might have been that of a sister to brother, or of one *bon camarade* to another; nevertheless it set her husband's heart beating, and his pulses bounding madly.

"*L'amour!*" sighed a fat Frenchman, who sat *en famille* with his wife and two daughters at a table close by. (Was the family of a Frenchman ever known to consist of more than two? To have none is to fail in his duty; to have more is wickedly to tempt Providence.) Armed with the inevitable toothpick, and thoroughly well satisfied with the dinner he had eaten, he was regarding the spectacle of two young people, who had apparently paused in the

business of dessert to stare at one another, with sensations of the profoundest pity.

"Bah!" said his wife, sallow, stout and greedy, the mother of his children, the object of his parents' choice, but by no means the ideal of his heart. "They are brother and sister—she can be no older than our Fifine—one does not marry a child like that!"

Madame has not half the sentiment of her lord, or a hundredth part of his imagination. She regulates her kitchen and household admirably; attends to the cutting out, making, and mending of the family clothes; amasses a *dot* for Marie, chooses a calling or profession for Jean, and rarely or never develops a soul.

Should she be a childless, rich woman, she flirts after a practical, systematic fashion until she is forty-five, after which she seeks in religion the excitement that, in one shape or another, she finds it absolutely impossible to live without.

Mignon's eyes strayed past Adam, and he

saw by the sudden contraction of the pupils that they were intently regarding something or somebody in the distance.

He did not turn his head, although every moment he expected to hear a hasty step, a loud voice . . . . and then wild words, perhaps blows, a scene, to follow.

"What are you looking at, Mignon?" he said quietly.

"At a young man," she said, "and O! such a wonderful one! I am sure Count D'Orsay in his palmiest days could not have beaten him. Did you not tell me the other day that these men are called *Gommeux?*"

"So they are," he said, a weight lifted from his mind; "and after all," he thought, "I am not to have this, the happiest evening I have ever known with her, destroyed by him. And under Henri III. they were called—what do you think?"

"The *Incroyables?*"

"No! they had your very name—they were called *Mignons;* while under the Re-

gency they were dubbed *roués*, because of Louis Philippe's well-known speech that every one of them deserved to be *roué*, or broken on the wheel."

"What is a *roué?*" said Mignon, tracing out a fanciful pattern on her dessert-plate with her strawberry stalks.

Adam, looking up, and encountering the eyes of a man who was at that moment passing him, felt it to be one of those odd coincidences of which life is full, that at the very moment when he was hesitating as to what reply he should give her, a sufficiently striking illustration in the flesh should appear before him.

"A bad man, Mignon," he said.

And even as he spoke he was looking Philip La Mert, who had seated himself at a table placed against the wall immediately behind Mignon, as calmly in the face as though he were a perfect stranger, whose appearance at Bignon's called for no more surprise on his own part than that of any other person present.

"And so," thought Adam, "he does not intend to make a scene, he knows that it would do no good, his plot is something deeper; nevertheless—courage!"

Mignon had left off trifling with her stalks, and was now drinking coffee.

The brightness of her mood had suddenly passed away; the anxious look had crept back to her eyes; the colour had faded out of her cheeks, leaving her, like Christabel,

"Fair, not pale."

And it seemed to Adam—and the time came when what then seemed like an unreasonable fancy recurred to him with all the force of a fulfilled prophecy—that the mere shadow of this man falling upon the girl had power to dim her brightness, and check the timid, gentle growth of those slender, lovely tendrils of regard that she was with hesitation beginning to put forth to himself.

"You think there will be a letter from Prue to-morrow?" she said, looking at him

anxiously. "I have not heard for two whole days, you know, and perhaps something may have happened. . . ."

"You are sure to hear from her to-morrow," he said hastily, for just now the one object of his life was to keep her from *thinking*, and though it is usually no such difficult matter to woo the very young from thought, he had never until to-night induced, for even one brief hour, this girl to see the sunlight of To-day save chequered with the dark shadows of Yesterday.

"And perhaps you will get a letter, too," she said wistfully, "with the good news in it for which I am hoping and waiting, and then we will go straight home, will we not? For O!" she added, shaking her head, "although we have seen and done so much, it seems a long, long time since the day that we were married!"

Her clear voice, distinct and pure as that of a child—and we all know how much farther a child's voice will travel than that of a grown

person—reached to Mr. La Mert's ears, and, his eyes meeting those of Adam, he smiled.

Such a smile, on such a face!

One would have said that this man must, by sheer force of will, have raised himself from a bed of sickness, to which he was bound to return so soon as the fictitious strength that now supported him should be exhausted. One would have said, too, that behind those burning eyes of his, raged a devil of recklessness and daring that boded mischief to someone, unless, indeed, it was to have its recoil violently upon himself.

"I am sorry you have found the time so long, Mignon," said Adam, quietly, "but cheer up—it is very nearly over now."

"And this day week," she said, her face one big smile, "we shall very likely be back again at the old place, and I shall have got my Prue again; and if you were to wake up in your own house, and *I* in Rosemary, we should both rub our eyes and think we had

been dreaming, and that we had never been married *at all!*"

"Should we?" he said, smiling; ay, he could even smile under the eyes of the man who sat and watched him yonder. "And now, if you are quite ready, Mignon" (he had paid the bill some time since); "shall we go?"

"I am quite ready," she said, stretching out her hand for her hat. And then he fell to wondering whether she would put it on without looking in the glass, or turn to the mirror behind her, and so come face to face with Philip La Mert.

Now when a woman puts on either hat, cloak, or bonnet without once looking to see if they are straight or awry, one may be positively certain that there is something radically wrong with that woman, either in heart, mind, or body, or that in her character there is some queer twist, that has placed her womanliness in abeyance, and spoiled her for those useful and lovely purposes for which she

was created. Without being *coquette*, it is natural to every woman to do the best she can for herself; it is, moreover, as disrespectful to society as to herself to appear in the guise of a sloven.

And so it was that Mignon, rising from her seat, *did* turn, and looking neither to the right nor left, but at the mirror before her, put up her slender hands to smooth her hair and fasten her hat, and, still regarding herself, saw Adam come from behind, and put her black silk cloak over her shoulders. Then she tied her ribbons, leisurely tucked up a stray love-lock that had escaped from the rest, the while her dress actually brushed Philip La Mert's arm; the while she must, had she given one glance downwards, have met the gaze of the man upon whose unconscious face she had showered such bitter tears on her wedding morning, fourteen days ago.

Then she began to draw on her gloves, turned away, and passed down through the crowded room with her husband.

Their disappearance seemed to break the spell that had held Mr. La Mert inert, as one dead, through the foregoing performance, and dashing down a gold piece upon the table where he had been making a pretence of dining, he rose up and followed them. He was trembling as though with an ague fit, his senses were reeling with passion and despair; the mere sound of her voice, the sight of her face had affected his brain as may strong wine the man whose body is enfeebled by privation and abstinence; the sight of what he had lost engendered in him a yet more deadly concentrated fury than he had known even in the first awful frustration of his hopes, and if on all the earth that night there was a man ripe for crime, it was Philip La Mert.

In the countenances of those he passed, he read some reflection of the madness of his own, for as that haggard face, lit by those flaming eyes, went by, all shrank from him as though he brought death in his track.

As he stood without, his brain somewhat

steadied by the cool night air, he saw in a *voiture* moving rapidly away, a bit of white and a black silk cloak, and inside that white gown and black cloak was, he well knew, Mignon.

In another moment he, too, was in a carriage, following them. "Thank God!" he cried aloud, lifting his eyes, impious as his words, to heaven, "that she does not love him. No, nor ever shall!" he added, with clenched hand. "He stole her from me, aye! let him look to it that I do not take my own back again, a something better than the loveless girl who gave her vows—no more—who shall yield up to me her heart, her soul—all!"

On, on, they drove, the pursuer and the pursued, through the brilliant streets of the beautiful city, that is surely as enchanted as any of which we read with bated breath in our nursery days, and loved and believed in with so unswerving a faith and devotion that I venture to think it would not have surprised

us much, if in our infant travels we had chanced upon them, and discovered our favourite heroes and heroines alive and happy, enjoying themselves just like other people.

Well, there is one city that all who seek may find, but if we would see her as she should be seen, let us not wait until we are old and sad, but go to her in the days of our youth, in the freshness of the spring-tide of our lives, when our consciences are pure, and our souls unsoiled by the smirch and the shame of sin and sorrow; when our steps move to the very rhythm and tune of the song of gladness, that bubbles up from the well-spring of joy that dwells in our hearts.

Above all, let us cast our memory behind us, and if we have studied history well, recall that which we have read concerning this city, less as a living, breathing record of facts, than as a brilliant and terrifying fable that does but entice and fascinate us the more . . . . then, and then only, can we draw her into our very blood as a thing of beauty that

"Will never
Pass into nothingness, but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health and quiet breathing.
. . . . Yea, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits."

And even if we are no longer very young and very happy, as we pass her portals does not dull Care step down from the pillion behind us, knowing that to him all entrance is denied? No sooner do we breathe her air than we are infected by that *gaieté de cœur*, that is the distinguishing characteristic of the Parisian, and our hearts quicken into vivid, healthy enjoyment. "See Naples and die," runs the proverb; let us rather say, "See Paris and live!" For there is an intoxication of life in her very air, and she is emphatically a city of neither yesterday nor to-morrow, but —to-day. All she asks of us is to take the present between our lips, and suck its sweetness slowly out, as oblivious of her past, as careless of her future as she. For she remem-

bers not her reverses and her humiliations, only in her heart live fresh and green her glories, her victories, and the crowns of her heroes. Emerging with radiant smile from the darkest abysm of shame and degradation, she dashes the blood from her brow, the foam from her lips, and crowning herself with lilies, calls upon her children to arise and rejoice with her.

Such an one, though stricken oft and violently by fate, outraged and rent in twain by the passions evoked by her own strength, can never die; though her glory be dimmed, yet can it never be utterly quenched, for the life she bears is a charmed one, and no more to be destroyed than the rainbow, whose colours fade indeed, but only to return again in all their splendour.

And so it is, that her children, though oftentimes, in their mad and senseless fury, they turn upon and rend the bosom that warmed and nourished them, yet love he with a deep and exceeding love, that is

stronger than the love of wife, and home, and children . . . . that she is the idol of the Frenchman's youth, maturity, and old age; and that as Paris is the very core of his heart, so does he die with her name upon his lips.

"Mignon," said Adam, rousing himself as the carriage stopped at the place where they usually descended for the Champs Elysées, "I beg your pardon for being such a dull companion, but I have been—thinking——"

"Hark!" she said, lifting her hand as they stood together on the veritable Elysian fields, where thousands of lamps glittered, and thousands of people went to and fro, "do you hear that girl's voice yonder? Let us go and listen!"

A few steps, and they passed into one of those strange, poetic, open-air concerts, "*Unter den Linden*," with the blue sky for a spangled canopy, the grass for a carpet, through the sea of up-turned faces, all directed towards the gaily-dressed, sweet-

voiced woman who faced them, smiling from the centre of the brilliantly-lit, gaudy stage before them.

Mignon, glancing up at the low screen of delicate leaves that alone came betwixt her brow and heaven, met the eyes of a man who was passing by to his place. "Adam," she said, pulling gently at his hand with a certain hurry and excitement in her soft voice, "did you see that? Is it possible? Could it have been—*Him?*"

CHAPTER II.

"'Tis the pest
Of love, that fairest joys give most unrest;
That things of delicate and tenderest worth
Are swallowed all, and made a second dearth
By one consuming flame . . . ."

SOMEBODY was leaning out of one of the windows of the Hôtel Bristol, engaged in dropping small pieces of bread-and-butter, one by one, on to something or somebody below. She was such a long, long way up, and the object of her attention such a long, long way beneath, that her missiles seemed to fall quite slowly, and were every one wide of the mark. At last, however, by dint of most careful perseverance and practice, she succeeded in hit-

ting the exact centre of that feature of the face which is perhaps more provocative of blows, as it is certainly more prone to resent them than any other, viz., the nose. The particular nose that was just then the target at which Mignon shot her unskilful arrows, belonged to the driver of a *voiture de remise* that was drawn up, apparently waiting for some person or persons to come out of the hotel and take their seats in it.

Disgracefully awakened from the doze into which he had fallen, and looking all about him and finally upwards, he at last discovered far above him the charming head thrust out through an open window that nodded with much energy, saying, as plainly as it could speak, and with the broadest emphasis, "*Attendez!*"

The man, recognising her, made a gesture to show that he understood, then sat immovable as before.

Adam, entering the *salon* just as Mignon's most energetic nods and becks were going

forward, stopped short with a sudden and most disagreeable sensation of surprise, then, advancing to her side, put out his head and looked down also.

"It was so lucky I saw him," said Mignon, drawing in her head, and blinking both her sun-dazzled eyes. "I do believe he was on the point of going away, quite out of patience, when I made him look up, and I would not have had him go for the world!"

Mr. Montrose, looking abroad and about with keen, quick scrutiny, could discover nothing, or at any rate nothing that he had expected or feared to see. Then a thought struck him.

"He is coming up?" he said calmly. "It was to him, then, that you were beckoning."

"Coming up?" she said, staring at him; "why should he do that, and how can he leave his horse and carriage?"

Adam broke into sudden relieved laughter as he looked out again, and recognised the conveyance, that, from the height whence he

regarded it, reminded him irresistibly of the chariot horsed and driven by the Industrious Fleas.

"I do believe," he said, "that it is your *cochon*, Mignon! But what is he doing there?"

"Have you forgotten," said the girl, popping her head out again to make sure that he had not gone, "that we told him to come for us at ten o'clock this morning *punctually?* And now," she added reproachfully, as she drew her flushed face in again, "it is nearly half-past!"

"And whose fault is that, Mignon?" said Adam, laughing; "did you not persist in sacrificing comfort to a fine view?—and when people live in the clouds, must you not make allowance for the time it takes to descend and get up again?"

"There is always the lift!" said Mignon, putting on her hat, and taking her cloak from a chair hard by, "and it does seem such a pity to waste the morning hours, the best of all the day."

The July sun was pouring his flood of light full upon the gay, bright *salon,* upon the man who leant his shoulders against the window-frame, and looked at his wife, upon the girl who stood thoughtfully tying her strings, altogether unconscious of his regard.

"Mignon," said Adam, looking at her critically, "I don't know much about those matters—but isn't your cloak a little—a little old-fashioned, dear?"

"How long ago did Red Riding Hood live?" said the girl. "A hundred—five hundred years—a thousand? I can't fancy our grandmothers, however remote, could have been *real* children, without knowing her story by heart! And just as old as she is, so old is my cloak, for if it were made in red instead of black it would be the very counterpart of hers!"

"We must buy you a new one," he said; "though I don't think we can afford Worth!" he added, laughing.

"He would show me the door if I went,"

said Mignon, with conviction, as she drew a "Marshal Niel" rose from the bouquet that Adam had just brought in and laid upon the table. "Did you not tell me yesterday that from the depths of his soul he despises an insignificant slender person, while he loves to dress a fine large woman with a *presence*?"

"Then," said Adam, glancing at the *svelte* gracious proportions of a figure that from crown to heel was of nature's proudest, most fastidious fashioning, "we will wait, Mignon, until you have developed into a fine woman, or at any rate something very different to what you are now!"

"Shall we ever come here again, I wonder?" she said half to herself, her eyes straying past him to the goodly city stretched out at her feet. "I hope not . . . at least without *her*."

"You have not yet given me a flower for my button-hole," said Adam quietly.

Every morning, and to him it was the shortest, sweetest minute of the whole day,

she was wont to fasten a flower in his coat, and had it pleased her to place in it a nosegay as big as footmen wear on a drawing-room day, he would have worn it without a murmur until she gave him a fresh one.

"I beg your pardon!" she said, turning at once, and selecting a pale bud from among its brighter sisters, with her eyes still full of thought, put up her little gloved hands and fastened the flower in its place.

The stalk was troublesome, she was a little longer than usual over her task, yet he stood perfectly still and silent, scarcely glancing, to all appearance, at the blue violets of her eyes, half seen through the brown fringe that curtained them, nor at the sweet tender mouth, of which he was in truth saying to himself,

> "Her lips were all my own, and—ah, ripe sheaves
> Of happiness! ye on the stubble droop,
> Yet never may be garnered . . . ."

How gentle he had to be with her, how patient, no one would ever know. Not one sweet overt violence of love did he permit

himself . . . . in her own good time she would come to him, until then he would put no pressure upon her, nor cast away the rich fruit that he saw ripening to him in the future, for the green unripe one of the present.

He had by now so schooled himself in self-command, that she never dreamed how the mere light touch of her hand upon his coat set his pulses throbbing, his heart beating madly, or how the temptation often rose within him like a giant to take her in his arms (for was she not his own ?) and pray her, for dear God's sake, to try and learn to love him a little—only a little, and so give back for the plenty he poured upon her, some better return than the heart-bareness that was his portion. But Mignon knew nothing of this. To all appearance he was far more indifferent and at his ease than she. In the depths of her eyes he sometimes thought he discovered a something that was not fear, but rather a dumb and piteous reproach, inducing in him some such shame as a man may experience who has

taken from a child's ignorant generous hand, a toy, of which it knew not then the exceeding value, but to the loss of which, awakening by-and-by, it falls to regarding with helpless condemnation the man that reft it from him.

"There!" said Mignon, stepping back and looking at the now garnished button-hole, "it really is very pretty indeed! I never fastened a better! But indeed that poor old fellow will think we are playing him a trick, and we have such a lot to do to-day!"

"Yes," said Adam, "there is a great deal to do to-day!" but he was thinking of other matters than she. As they left the room together, it suddenly occurred to him how, each time Philip La Mert had spoken with Mignon, she had worn a rose at her breast, and she was wearing one to-day!

The faithful *cocher* was still at his post—fast asleep.

Why is it usually so much more easy to come out of all pleasant things, than to enter into them? And from that choicest good on

earth, sleep, we emerge even more quickly than from any of the rest.

So that it took but a moment to make a very happy man a very careworn, troubled one, and away they went through the clear bright morning, along the cool freshly-watered streets, while the divine early summer fruits, that seemed to have overflowed the shops to the pavements beyond, were here, there, and everywhere, as also the countless flowers that, in their gay profusion, seemed to tell how, out yonder, beyond the great city, the world was all ablaze with summer's jocund mirth. And who that has seen Paris in her early morning robe will deny that in it she is every whit as fair as in her crowded noonday brightness, and dazzling midnight splendour ?

"What a delightful thing it is," said Mignon, with a sigh of relief, "to be for once behind a horse that will *go*. All the others we have had simply crawled."

"Yes," said Adam, absently, and wishing with all his heart that the animal in question

would go faster still; for one backward glance, given immediately after leaving the hotel, had informed him that they were followed.

In the midst of his pre-occupation he could not help smiling. . . . this wild-goose chase seemed to him so laughable an affair; and, after all, what did the pursuer promise himself? A scene of storming and raving, after the good old melodramatic fashion; an invitation to fight for the lady somewhere out of sight, yet near enough for her to hear the pistol-shots, and rush upon the scene tearing her beautiful fair hair?—a forcible abduction in the streets of Paris?—but no! the days of brave Lochinvar were over, though they were very good, bright, wholesome days, and ten thousand times sweeter and purer than any we ever get now!"

"Would you mind very much if we drove in the *Bois* first, and to the Poste Restante afterwards, Mignon?" said Adam.

It was their custom to fetch the letters daily, and afterwards read them as they went

on their expeditions; but the girl was always restless and anxious until she knew for certain whether there was, or was not, a letter from Prue, so her face fell, and Adam saw it.

"You will not go very far?" she said. "For I have got it in my head that there will be some news to-day."

"We will go no farther than you wish," he said—then gave some rapid order to the driver that she could not catch.

It was with a feeling of unconquerable distaste, and almost fear, that Adam shrank from the moment when Mignon should come face to face with her past (nay, was he not her present?) lover again. That wedding morning of his. . . . would he ever forget it—when he found his young wife, pale and unresisting, clasped in the embrace of Philip La Mert? Not even a lifelong happiness with her could ever efface that bitter, galling memory.

They were passing through the Place de La Concorde, where—O, mockery of name!—

had once been shed the blood of some of the purest and noblest, as of the vilest and most infamous, of France. Hither came proud, ever-beautiful Marie Antoinette, expiating by the heroism of her death, the heartlessness and frivolity of her life; and hither, too, brave Charlotte Corday, and noble Madame Roland; while stepping lightly after (for they knew how to die, these proud and haughty aristocrats, who accepted death with less scorn than life, at the hands of the low and brutal *canaille*), came the flower of the French nobility, a gay and winsome array of courtly shapes in ruffled lawn and silks, for they went not meanly clad to their last great levée in those days!

What manner of looks were those, I wonder, that they cast downwards upon the famous *tricoteuses* who circled round the guillotine, knitting quietly between the intervals of the brilliant ghastly show? Even such as the king of the forest may give in dying, to the currish, slinking shapes who

gather about him, knowing that he is powerless as of old to scatter or destroy them. . . .

"I wonder," said Mignon, thoughtfully, as they passed swiftly along the famous Avenue that, not so long ago, was the vantage-ground of luxury and folly, "whether it would be better to begin climbing L'Arc de Triomphe over night, or start very early in the morning, and so have a reasonable chance of reaching the top before dark?"

"Get up early in the morning, by all means," said Adam, "as I wish you to see Paris from it by night, when the lamps are lit; but there are not quite so many stairs as you suppose!"

"It ought to be very good," said Mignon, "considering the trouble it is to get there! So far as I can make out, the Monument was the merest *joke* to it!"

"And did you ever climb that—really?"

"Yes, indeed, the whole school! But when I got to the top—I don't know how it was—but I could only walk two-double! I

had a dreadful feeling that if I stood upright it would all topple over! And once—I thought I should have died of fright—it actually *shook*."

"I can faithfully promise you that the Arc de Triomphe will not!" said Adam, gravely, "no, not if it were burdened with ten thousand such thistledown slips of girls as you, Mignon!"

They are in the Bois now. Mignon comes to it every day, and always at an unfashionable hour, either quite early, or rather late, and she knows every winding way, and nook and corner, and there is not one dell to which she has not pierced, or one mysterious glade that she has not traversed. When she first beheld it, she was wild with joy and surprise, but now she enjoys it in that best and most perfect of all ways, silence. And she finds the daisies and woodland flowers that gem its carpet no whit the less fair and sweet that they have been watered again and again with the blood of man; that hither, as though

the world were not wide enough to furnish any other spot on which they could draw their swords, men must come to the place where God and they alike have shown their choicest handiwork.

"But are we not going to get out?" said Mignon in surprise, as they still went swiftly on.

"Not to-day," said Adam.

"And after all," she said, "the sooner we leave here, the sooner we shall get the letters!"

Leaving the Bois by a different outlet, they came ere long to a more crowded part of the city, where, as Adam knew, the traffic would render it difficult for one carriage to closely follow another, provided the first had a good start. Giving some brief order to the driver, the latter obeyed his instructions so well that in a few moments there intervened between the two carriages a block of conveyances that Mr. La Mert would not find it an easy matter to pass. Presently, to

Mignon's astonishment, the driver turned sharply in at the courtyard of the Louvre.

"But the letters," she cried, "the letters!"

"You shall have them almost immediately," he said, leaping out and looking back. "Meanwhile, come, Mignon, come!"

He held out his hand, the girl put hers into it, wondering and a little afraid; his voice recalled to her so vividly the morning when he had bade her follow him, and she had willed to stay.

"But I have seen all these things before," said Mignon, a little vexed, as they passed through the museum of ancient and modern sculpture, where men and women

> "Not yet dead,
> But in old marble ever beautiful,"

looked down upon the perishable atoms of humanity that had been coming and going, going and coming, before their eyes this thousand years and more.

We call this, our nineteenth century, the age of progress and civilisation, and look

back with disdainful scorn on the old benighted days, although we admit that here and there might be found in them a great poet, sculptor, or architect. We hug ourselves on our culture, our art, our improvements; we imagine that our feet are set on a path illumined by the searching rays of truth, yet what are our boasts, our mouthings, our vain pretensions, to the accomplished deeds of those mighty men who, living in those splendid and so-called days of darkness, talked not of their works, but accomplished them, content to leave their fame in the hands of posterity? Be sure that they were not for ever looking backward to decry the past, or forward to anticipate the future; they just took their lives in their hands, and, unlike us, they did act

> "In the living present,
> Heart within, and God o'erhead!"

It would puzzle us, indeed, to find in our midst a Homer, a Phidias, a Socrates, or a Zeuxis, and yet, forsooth, *they* walked in the

darkness of ignorance, while we, a puny struggling throng, holding out blind hands to that which we can never reach, are bathed in the light of *truth!*

Adam suddenly caught Mignon's arm and drew her behind a group of statuary that stood near. She stared at him in amazement, but he was not looking at her, but at Rideout, who had just entered, and was casting his eyes about, plainly in search of them.

He saw neither her nor Adam, and with hasty step sprang up the stairs and vanished.

"We will go now," said Adam.

His voice and manner had suddenly changed, he looked bright and happy; his spirits rose like quicksilver at the thought that he had shaken off his shadow, and now was free, for an hour or two at least, from the haunting consciousness of being dogged wherever he went.

"But," said Mignon, "as we *are* here, I should like to see the Kauffmann's pictures again, and——"

"To-morrow," said Adam, hurrying on. "Here is the carriage; jump in, Mignon, quick!"

Puzzled and bewildered, Mignon took her place, Adam sprang in beside her, the driver cracked his whip, they were off!

"After all," said Adam to himself, with as much glee as though he were a runaway schoolboy, "I do believe I have given him the slip; and for at least an hour longer there will be no one to come between my little sweetheart and me."

CHAPTER III.

"What! frighted with false fire?"

MIGNON had received her letter, and, after tearing it open with her usual devouring eagerness, had been met by the usual disappointment. Adam, too, had got a budget, but after glancing at, and frowning over the first of the batch, he had thrust them all into his pocket, resolved to permit nothing to cast a shadow upon the brightness of these hours that he somehow felt to be stolen. And this notion gave to them the zest that uncertainty alone can bestow, for is it not one of the oddest contradictions of human nature that we should only be capable of a full appreciation of our

joys when we hold them but on the frailest and most uncertain tenure?

But now, as he stands with her under the roof of Nôtre Dame, his mood changes, he grows thoughtful; while something of the feeling of the man who wrote in energetic doggerel anent the glories of Niagara—

> "When standing under the Horse-shoe Fall
> Didn't *it* look great? didn't *I* look small?"

steals into Mignon's mind. She has never consciously measured herself in any way, by any standard, but now it is suddenly borne in upon her what an insignificant petty *speck* she is.

She has it not in her thoughts that some day she will describe with her weak fingers, or paltry tongue, her impressions of this vast and superb cathedral, therefore she strikes no attitudes indicative of an enormous amount of appreciation, combined with a totally inadequate power of receptivity; nor does she gaze exhaustively at the roof, the floor, the whole

magnificent *coup d'œil*, then fall to taking notes distractedly, as though these splendours could be transferred to the paper, or carried away in her pocket by a mere violent effort of will. An old-young lady standing near, who is attired with the usual stern economy of the British female when she goes abroad, is going through all these evolutions, but Mignon just stands hushed and solemn, feeling (as she has never before felt under vault made by human hands) that here one might look up, up, and seem to see the blue heavens shining through the apparently illimitable distance above. Involuntarily she has clutched at Adam's hand, like a frightened child, and holds it fast, while he, who has seen it all before, is seeing it all over again, with the girl's beautiful startled eyes, in the quiver of her proud sensitive lips, in the colour that comes and goes in her cheeks. . . . .

After all, he says to himself, he has not quite sounded the depths or mastered the intricacies of his young wife's heart. It was

but a minute ago that, standing in the *Sacristie*, she had proved herself wholly unimpressed by the gold and silver treasures of the cathedral, nay, in the very midst of an obvious fable recounted by the Sacristan, had remarked, in her clear English voice, "I do *not* believe that!"

But now she doubted and questioned nothing, she simply saw, and understood.

There are men and women who live and die without understanding, who go through life with unseeing eyes, unhearing ears, who are never even dimly conscious of the ungrasped treasures strewn in their path, whose insensibility to noble influences is so profound, that they are not so much as aware of lacking the one divine spark that will kindle the soul into life, and turn the commonest things on earth to beauty, the very pebbles of hard experience to jewels of gold and silver.

Therefore Adam rejoiced when he saw how this child, whom no one could reckon wise, and by some might be counted as frivolous

and shallow, was so blessed by Heaven as to possess "the seeing eye."

How small the people looked as they went to and fro! They appeared to crawl upon the face of the great enclosure like flies, while their puny voices made not so much as one faint echo through the silence. . . . . Strange that man, the director and controller of such gigantic forces, should ever appear confounded before the might of his own works. Strange that, after toiling long and successfully at some great undertaking that has brought him fame, he should never feel his insignificance and evanescence so keenly as when he steps back to behold it in the full majesty of its completion. It requires a bold and even rebellious spirit to enable him to stand his ground firmly before the dumb witness that proclaims how *it* will endure when the subtle brain that conceived, the nervous cunning hand that formed it, shall have reverted to its native dust. It is to the unenlightened eye the triumph of matter over mind, of dull

reality over genius, of the supremacy of the things that remain over those that wither and pass away. And yet there are spirits, bold and brave enough to sweep aside with scorn the mere outward appearance of perpetuity, and looking with clear eyes to the *beyond*, behold the living fire of the essence that shall outlive the accomplished work, even as the work has in its turn outlived the ephemeral dust, and in that consciousness will dare with unabashed front to contemplate the creation of their own hands.

Loosing her hand from Adam's, Mignon paused before that marvellous piece of sculpture that represents a man half lifting himself from his open coffin, ghastly, trembling, nerveless, yet borrowing in that awful extremity of weakness, a strength more terrible in its impotence than had been an utter collapse, with the sweat of exhaustion on his brow, the foretaste of the tortures of the damned in his blank and awful eyes, and the secrets of the charnel-house locked within

those frozen lips . . . . imperishable record of a story so supernatural and romantic as to haunt the memory of him who hears it for many a long day.

Wandering still hither and thither, she all at once discovered Adam to be no longer by her side. It is easily accomplished, a separation in an unknown place, one false step to the right or to the left, and each effort to retrace it, results in setting the seekers farther and farther from each other.

Mignon, however, made no very diligent search after her companion, she was neither lonely nor afraid, for was not Muriel with her in the spirit if not in the body, now and always ?

It mattered little, as Adam had one day said to himself, the manner of man by whose side she walked through life, for she heeded no face, hearkened to no voice, as she followed the beckoning will-o'-the-wisp of her sister's unknown fate.

Presently she found herself once more at

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the entrance to the cathedral, and—yes—there was the old *cocher* fast asleep on the box as usual, or pretending to be.

How hot the sun was; how burning the pavement underfoot! For the first time that day the sun was making himself actively and tyrannically disagreeable, and Mignon looked about her, seeking some shady place in which to hide herself and wait for Adam's appearance. Not being able to find the desired haven she strolled round the cathedral, to see how it looked from an outside view, and as the last flutter of her dress vanished, the *cocher* opened one of his sleepy old eyes, and recognised her. Somebody else too, at a considerable distance, and scarcely believing in his good fortune, hastened forward in pursuit. Following her fancy the girl came to a promenade planted with trees, and adorned in the centre with a fountain that ought to have been playing, but was not. A few *bonnes* were sitting there, knitting and gossiping while they overlooked certain odd, old-

fashioned children, the like of whom one never sees out of France.

Half-a-dozen soldiers in their ugly red and blue coats, and with their impossible waists and fearful and wonderful nether garments, were standing about, shrugging their shoulders, gesticulating, gabbling as only a Parisian knows how, and Mignon looked at them with an amused smile, mentally measuring their proportions with those of the stalwart, broad-shouldered red-coats, of whom she has seen so many in her time at home.

A market-woman or two were passing by, in their homely thrifty dress, and clean close white caps, refreshing spectacles in these days of tawdry cheap finery and pretension, when every serving-maid makes it her aim to copy her mistress as closely as she can, and the line of demarcation between the higher and lower orders has long been passed. All young women are young ladies nowadays, the milliner's apprentice, the bar-room maid, equally with the daughters of an earl, and the good

old title of "a young lady of quality" has gone out for ever with the departed days when only gentlewomen and persons of rank wore brocade and lawn, while the middle and lower classes were clad in homespun and duffle grey.

Still wandering idly on, Mignon came out upon an odd-looking, low white building, that attracted her attention in the first place by its extreme ugliness, and in the second by the unceasing stream of men, women, and children who were pouring in and out of it. They seemed to be for the most part artisans, and quite poor people, although a few carriages waited without. Grown used to the open exhibitions of Paris, that, unlike those of London, are generously thrown open, free to the public, Mignon drew nearer, stepped over the threshold and entered.

At first she could make out nothing. Whatever show there might be was in some place beyond, she thought, as the out-coming people jostled her in the narrow entrance.

And then she began to wonder why all these people looked at her so strangely, why a whisper suddenly passed from lip to lip, while one or two men, as though unconsciously, put up their hands as if to stay her progress.

She was so young, so entirely alone, so innocent of regard, moreover her beauty was of so gay and *débonnaire* a character that one would have taken her to be on her way to some joyous spectacle, some comely, pleasant sight—"therefore," muttered these poor people beneath the breath, "what did she *here?*"

She was *Anglaise*, it was true, and that would account for a good deal, but did these English ladies go in such careless, happy fashion to seek a lost father, brother, or sweetheart?

Another step or two, and, no one hindering her, she found herself in what appeared to be a large and shabby room, a portion of which was shut off from the rest by a high glass partition.

This transparent wall was lined by a row of persons who all appeared to be gazing in intent silence at some object, or objects that lay beyond. Facing her as she entered was a whitewashed wall, upon which hung in straight formal folds, like headless imitations of pinioned bodies, a strange collection of garments, for the most part ragged, but all soiled and discoloured by the (apparent) action of water.

Mignon, looking all about her in perplexity, yet with a certain sense of pleasurable excitement and anticipation, for her curiosity was by now thoroughly aroused, stepped lightly towards the glass wall, with its fringe of absorbed human beings.

An old woman, hardened in sin and sorrow, with a heart that had outlived all sympathy with human misery, turning and seeing that unconscious, blooming face behind her, suddenly, and not knowing why, though the instinct was the same as prompts one to rescue a child who wanders blindfold into dange r

lifted her hand with a sudden gesture, and waved the girl back. But Mignon, understanding nothing, and disregarding that kindly warning, pressed nearer, and looking over the woman's shoulder through the glass beyond, beheld—this.

Upon a black marble slab immediately below her eyes was stretched the body of a young girl.

Partially covered by a rude board, the limbs were bare, the bosom was shrouded by a veil of rich wet brown hair, over which a small stream of water flowed sluggishly.

The face—O God! the face, on which the stiffness of death had already set in, whose was it—*whose?*

Could those heavy-lidded eyes lift their glance to Mignon's, would they not be revealed as richly brown as that veil of dripping hair?

Could those silent, beautiful lips utter sound, would they not shriek aloud, "*Gabrielle! Gabrielle!*"

Or had those nerveless arms power to uplift themselves, would they not close with breathless, loving gladness upon the girl who stood, an image of stone, gazing downwards with eyes more fearful than even those heavy-lidded ones of the dead?

Those little feet that lay so still and quiet, had they not trodden the selfsame path from early childhood that the living ones yonder had pressed, and being parted by the cruel intervention of fate, and set upon divergent paths, had they at last again met together—thus?

Mignon's dull brain did not turn, her tongue did not cry aloud, her numb heart was pulseless and still as that of the piteous drowned thing yonder, as she withdrew her eyes from it and looked at the only other occupant of the enclosure. A man in the meridian of his strength and early manhood, upon whose brow death had set an untroubled serene majesty that its comeliness had never known in life, that never indeed comes to any man until he

has tasted of the fruit of the immortals, nor is ever seen upon his face in the hour of his greatest happiness, his most unalloyed content.

If one has ever doubted that the joys of heaven are greater than those of earth, need one go farther than the common everyday sight of a dead man or woman's face? Mignon's eyes travelled slowly back to the thing that lay before her.

"Muriel . . . ." she said in a whisper, "Muriel . . . . I have not welcomed you, my darling . . . . because I did not understand just at first that I had really found you . . . . found you . . . ." she paused, looked vacantly about, then back again at the girl she addressed. "Can you not come to me?" she said, still in the same tone, "for I cannot get to you—see there is this cruel glass between us, and I can't . . . . I can't . . . ."

"Why are you here, my darling?" she went on monotonously, "with all these people

staring in upon you . . . . and you must be cold, my heart . . . . cold . . . . are you asleep? I have waited for you so long, but now I have found you . . . ."

On either side the people had fallen away before her, staring and wondering, as she leaned her brow against the glass talking, or (as those who listened expressed it) gibbering quietly to herself.

"It is time for you to awake, Muriel . . ." she said, "the sun is shining; how can you sleep so soundly with it full upon your eyes? Do you not know that it is summer-time?—the time that you always loved . . . ."

The girl's voice changed, and there fell from her lips, as though unconsciously, a snatch of the old talismanic song:

"Cherry ripe, cherry ripe, ripe, I cry;
Full and fair ones, come and buy,
Come and buy . . ."

She broke off, put up her hand to her head, gazed uncertainly on the faces around her . . . . heard one woman say to another, "Is

she mad? To be talking—to be singing—to the *dead?*"

She caught the word *morte,* and the unknown nameless fear that had been creeping and shuddering through her mind, took shape and substance, and clothed in words, rose up a living shape to confront her with its hideous existence.

It was suddenly borne in upon her that the something strange upon Muriel's face, that she had vainly tried to understand, was indeed something that by its strangeness was set far beyond her power of comprehension, and to which the rude lips of the woman who spoke, had given a name that she could not have found for herself . . . . that not on Death's counterfeit, sleep, she looked, but on Death himself, who had entered into his kingdom, and with silent majesty taken the place of that counterfeit for ever and ever.

In that supreme moment, and seeing that all power of expression by word or deed was denied to her, it may be that the poor

overtasked, and already tottering brain would have turned, had not help arrived —help under strange guise, from a strange hand!

Some one grasped her hand suddenly and firmly, a voice urgent and wild cried, "Come away, Mignon! come away!"

Turning she saw close to her own, a face that seemed familiar to her, yet knew not whose it was, or where, or when, she had last beheld it.

And the new comer, as he looked into her blue eyes, blank as death, clear as crystal, at her lips, those once lovely, laughing lips that he so well and passionately remembered, now drawn convulsively back from the small clenched white teeth, at the whole face from whence every trace of youth and tenderness had departed, might well believe himself to be in the presence of one who, in the first measureless dread and wonder of an awful, and hitherto unimagined sight, had been struck to stone, each feature frozen into the

expression they took on the first lightning-stroke of revelation.

"Do you know what is there?" she said in a whisper, the power of speech returning to her, and pointing with her lifted forefinger at the glass; "do you know *who it is*, I say?"

"Yes, yes," he said, looking only at her, "I know—only come away, Mignon—such sights as these are enough to kill you—come!"

"No," she said calmly; "you cannot know, or you would not talk of my coming away . . . . I heard some one say she was . . . . dead . . . ." she went on, pressing nearer to him, and, gazing at him with her beautiful wild eyes, "but it is not possible that it is true, only there is a look upon her face . . . . *a look* . . . . that I never saw on Muriel's face before . . . ." He dropped her hand as though it were an adder that had stung him.

"Muriel? . . . ." he stammered out, "whom

do you know of that name? Why do you use it . . . . why . . . ."

Of all names under heaven there could not be to him a more terrible one uttered by Mignon's lips than this.

"She is there," said the girl, still in that slow, terrible whisper, and pointing again at the glass.

Philip La Mert, with a face that reflected back the horror of her own, stared at her as a man may at some mocking spirit that having stolen his thoughts, takes human shape, and echoes them in human language.

"Muriel in there!" he said, pale as ashes, and taking a step back. "What are you saying, Mignon . . . . and what is Muriel to you?"

"She was my life," said Mignon wildly, "but now she is . . . . see," she cried, and snatched his hand and pulled him forwards, for she was by now abandoned to a fury of unconsciousness to all, save one overmastering idea. She remembered not that this man

had once been her lover, she knew only that she had found her sister, found her . . . . thus.

Instantaneous as had been her gesture, thought with him had been more rapid still. "There are more Muriels than one in the world"—had flashed through his mind in that moment's space.

And then, compelled by her, he looked—looked, and recoiling violently as from one who had suddenly leaped out from ambush to smite him his death-blow, covered his face with his hands, as though he would shut out from his eyes, as from his thoughts, the sight that confronted him.

The crowd shrugged its shoulders in contemptuous wonder. What were these English people making such a ridiculous fuss about? First the girl, then the man—Bah! One would think they had neither of them ever seen *une cadavre* in their lives before, and what was there to be afraid of, pray, in those two wholesome pleasant corpses yonder?

Sometimes, to be sure, there were spectacles here calculated to give timid people a turn, but to-day, why there was nothing, absolutely nothing!

"You are sorry?" said Mignon, gently, finding it but natural that his agitation should be excessive, his air that of a madman, that his frame should shudder and bow as one under the stroke of an awful and irreversible fate; for was not Muriel dead, Muriel.

"The sweetest flower of all the field—"

and would it not be strange if all creation did not mourn the loss of its loveliest, brightest favourite, from whose fair body the warm life had fled away for evermore?

All things, animate and inanimate, would surely weep and cry aloud for her, for the girl who had loved them all so well, whose life had indeed been one long lesson of love from its joyous dawn, to this, the inconceivable horror and degradation of its accomplished end. . . .

"I thought she was asleep," said Mignon, "but she is dead . . . . quite dead . . . . and in her hand there is no flower, and she always bade us, when she should die, to rain them down upon her lips, and brow, and breast, and all of white . . . . pure white . . . ."

"Come away!" cried Philip La Mert hoarsely, lifting his face from the hands that were powerless as the glass before him to shield what lay beyond from his consciousness.

Even as he did so, the dreadful fascination that ever drags our eyes to the sight that is the most heartrending the whole world can afford to us, impelled him to look again at the object before him.

Something — what was it? — suddenly arrested that swift abhorrent glance, transforming it instantly to a keen and collected scrutiny that he pursued with indomitable will, inexorable patience: feature by feature, line by line, slowly and carefully as a painter

who scans his work ere sending it forth to challenge the criticism of the world, he examined the lineaments and form of the drowned girl before him.

Then, a change, striking and marvellous, slowly crept over him. The colour rushed back to his cheeks, the light to his eyes, as throwing back his arms with a gesture of ineffable relief, and expanding his breast as a man, who, perishing for lack of air, finds himself once more breathing the bounty of God's air, "*It is not Muriel!*" he said.

CHAPTER IV.

"When devils will their blackest sins put on
They do suggest it first with heavenly show."

THERE are times when we accept human voices as though they were sent straight from heaven, when some instinct tells us that they are *true*, and it does not even occur to us to question them; and the occasion of Philip La Mert's making the above remarkable speech was one of them. Mignon looked in his face and *knew*.

Then, the shock of joy being even more awful than had been the revelation, her brain reeled, and she fell down as one dead at his feet. He was powerless to raise her, he himself staggered as he stood . . . . lawless and

extravagant in all his emotions, he had during the past few moments been possessed successively by the most powerful and irresistible passions that sway mankind.

Pursuing with headlong fury the ardently loved and wildly-coveted object of his desires, he had been suddenly called upon, in the full tide of tumultuous passion, to experience an equally violent emotion in a totally opposite direction. The intensest love that a man can know, the profoundest remorse that the human heart can experience . . . . these were the opposing currents that had met in shock so fearful that it was matter for small marvel if brain and soul bent beneath the strain imposed upon it, and that he was, in the whirlwind of conflicting sensations, as one from whom his wits have been stolen by wine.

A hasty step, a parting of the staring, gesticulating crowd, and Adam appeared, his eyes taking in, with one lightning-glance, the *tableau* before him.

His wife stretched, insensible, at the feet

of her former lover . . . that lover gazing down upon her, wild, disordered, pale as she, with love, horror, and a nameless something that was not, yet touched nearly upon, despair.

For a moment the sight arrested the husband's swift, on-coming steps — for a moment there flashed in his eyes the ominous gleam that had dwelt there on his wedding morning when he had found his hour-old wife in the arms of the man who now stood before him—then, advancing, he kneeled down, and lifting in his arms that little quiet, helpless figure, he carried her out of the building.

He called for water, and after a slight delay, some one brought it. Not for long, however, lasted this, her first lapse of consciousness. With a gasping sob and sigh, she opened her eyes, her hand wandered upwards in bewilderment to her brow, she moved her head from side to side, and looked around.

At that moment, a young man in the dress

of an artisan pushed his way roughly through the crowd, and with hurried steps entered the place they had just quitted. A moment later, a sharp, quick cry was heard within, then complete silence followed.

A crowd is formed by one caprice, it is dispersed by another; its curiosity is so insatiable that having bolted one morsel, it instantly demands another. In a few seconds, therefore, Mignon, her husband, and Philip La Mert were standing alone, the rabble having disappeared into the Morgue in the confident expectation of seeing something like a tragedy. As to that business out there—bah! it was imbecile, a ridiculous fuss about nothing—because, forsooth, a silly *Anglaise* could not stand the sight of two corpses, and such fine handsome bodies too, quite a picture! *Va!* what could be more pleasant and comely?

I wonder, can any shameless thing under God's sky equal the hardened, brutal indifference of the Parisian crowd, that visits its deadhouse as it goes to the play, regarding

them equally in the light of a show, and manifesting as complete an unconcern at the one as at the other, save when they revel in, and gloat upon, the horrors spread before them?

Mignon slipped from Adam's arms, and half supported by him, looked uncertainly about her. Where was she and what did it all mean? Then her wandering eyes fell upon Philip, and her husband, who was watching her, saw a sudden, quick look of recognition, gladness—what was it?—flash in her eyes, and brighten her regard.

In an instant—and surely no bird ever flew to her mate with more rapidity or eagerness—she had left her husband, and was at Mr. La Mert's side, clasping his arms with both hands, and gazing upwards into his face with a passion of entreaty and eagerness, her eyes asking the question that her lips refused to speak.

Adam, stirring neither hand nor foot, but looking passively on, was conscious of a sen-

sation as of cold fingers closing gently about his heart.

Before Mr. La Mert had time to speak, several people came out of the Morgue all talking together.

"Did you hear him?" said a young woman in French, shrugging her shoulders with indifference; "she was his sweetheart, you understand, and he was jealous and left her —so she was fool enough to drown herself, and now, *mon Dieu!* he is like a madman, trying to get to her—he wants to kiss her, he says . . . . to kiss her! and she is dead!"

"You hear them, Mignon?" cried Philip, in his pre-occupation, using the only name by which he had ever known her. "You understand what they are saying? That . . . . which you saw was only a poor *grisette*, the man who went in was her lover . . . . the extraordinary resemblance was a chance one . . . ." He ceased speaking suddenly, whither were his words leading him? Other ears than

those of a half-crazed girl were open to him now.

"Only a poor *grisette!*" said Mignon in a clear, intense whisper, while her hands unclasped themselves from his arm and fell heavily by her sides, "only a *grisette*, but perhaps her life was sweet to her . . . . and O!" she added with a very bitter cry, "*it might have been Muriel!*"

It was to herself that she spoke, not to Philip . . . . yet through his triple armour of impenitence, worldliness and passion, those unconscious words pierced to and awoke that disregarded and half-dead "sentinel of virtue" his conscience, pointing with divine finger of light to the path of duty that stretched before him. In that instant of revelation, and with the bold decision that so pre-eminently distinguished this man for both good and evil (that quality which, turned in the right direction makes the hero and the saint, in the wrong, the rebel and the infidel) he saw his duty plain and clear, and resolved to do it.

"*It might have been Muriel* . . . ." his lips moved, he was dumbly repeating Mignon's words over to himself.

As he stood there, silent, downcast, the disorder and struggle suddenly gone out of his face, the reckless look of evil faded from brow and lip, and in its place a faint day-dawn of something better, that might, God willing, in the fulness of time grow to a meridian of strength and goodness . . . . how was it possible that any one should know of the battle that had been fought, the victory that had been won in those few moments?

Not Adam . . . . not Mignon . . . . only he himself was beginning to understand . . . . beginning to see the light shining beyond the distant mountain-tops . . . . to feel that the wrong was turning to right, the crooked puzzle of evil to the clear and noble explanation of good, that for him as for others, there was a place, however poor and paltry, among the workers in the great scheme of life.

Adam too was silent—those words of

Mignon's were Greek to him, totally ignorant as he was of all that had gone before. What could he think but that she had been speaking to Philip La Mert of her sister, placing a confidence in him that made his own blood boil with rage . . . . that she should betray to this man, this almost stranger, that blot on her name which he himself endured, yet never forgot . . . . and for the first time (and in this he was cruelly unjust) the childish innocence that he had so loved in the girl, appeared to him almost in the light of a misfortune to herself, a sin against him.

He was entirely unaware of any cause that should have stretched her unconscious at Philip La Mert's feet, and afterwards have drawn her from her husband's arms to Philip La Mert's side, save that she loved him, had loved him all along, although she might not have fully realised the fact until she experienced the shock of meeting him again.

Was he perpetually (he asked himself) to assist at these unseemly and degrading scenes?

—was he always to be placed in the despicable position of a man who could win, yet could not hold, who grasped the shadow of rights, while the substance for ever eluded him?

Without a word he took Mignon's hand (she was not heeding him, to the last her eyes were fixed upon Philip) and led her to the carriage that was waiting.

Speech was impossible to him . . . . a demon had broke loose and was working wild havoc in his breast . . . . broad daylight though it was, he could scarcely see to guide his own and Mignon's footsteps.

She, too, could not speak; she was utterly exhausted by the alternate agony and relief that had so rapidly succeeded each other. Yet it had been well if she could have spoken ere he turned away, and removed from his mind the impression that the events of the past five minutes had burned in on it.

What a misleading, mischief-working, life-spoiling thing is this same "impression!" It grows out of the air, it is formed by a glance,

a sigh, a gesture; suspicion endows it with life, jealousy nurses it to maturity, and by us it is accepted as a fact, nay, as more—for a fact is a substantial reality, capable of explanation or palliation, but this flimsy intangible "impression" is not to be combated—we cannot wage war against an airy phantom, and so it remains with us unchallenged to our dying day.

Having placed Mignon in the carriage, Adam paused a moment, regained possession of his voice, told the driver to wait, and retraced his steps to the spot where Philip La Mert still stood.

The eyes of the two men met. No unworthy combatants they, and in the regard of each shone forth a fearless, intrepid spirit that made them, even in their enmity, akin, while something of

> "The stern joy that warriors feel
> Of foeman worthy of their steel"

ran like fire through the veins of both.

Judging (from Adam's point of view) by what had lately passed, it was for him to look the *rôle* of the despicable, derided husband (for a woman degrades her husband even more than herself when she stoops to compromise her honour in howsoever a small degree), for the other, the triumphant, successful lover, to be master of the occasion—yet, in the conversation that followed, it was Adam, not Philip, who took, and held the supremacy.

"Mr. La Mert," he said quietly, "it has pleased you to follow my wife to Paris, to dog her footsteps wherever she may go, and finally to force yourself upon her so soon as you discovered her to be unfortunately alone, and deprived of my protection.

"I have to ask you whether it be your intention to persist in the prosecution of this unmanly pursuit, also—for I imagine that you have some ultimate views—what may be the end that you propose to yourself?"

"My intentions were," said Mr. La Mert

slowly, "to follow her and you—wherever you might go—to the world's end if needs were, but to be always at your elbow, you, whom I counted to be the thief that had, in my absence, stolen that which I believed to be all my own—nor knew of any other rash hand stretched out to grasp it, else I had guarded it with a care that it had gone hard with me if you found means to outwit.

"I purposed to watch and wait, whether it were days, or months, or years, but sooner or later to get speech with her, to arouse in her breast a feeling of contempt for you, of pity for *me* (and she has a very tender and pitiful heart), the rest I left to time, my own patience and cunning and the devil's help, believing that I should win her away from you, back to me, at last. I would have kept to the last letter the words I swore to her when first I had speech with her—how if any other man stole her from me, I would move heaven and earth to regain her.

"You love her," he said with a gesture of indescribable bitterness, "therefore you are able to comprehend something of the loss I have sustained: and I love her too—as I have loved her from the first day I saw her innocent face; as I shall love her still to the day of my death."

"Enough," said Adam sternly, to whom this avowal on the part of a man of Mr. La Mert's antecedents and confessed designs appeared to be the worst possible taste, "of your past intentions—what are your present ones?"

"To abandon my pursuit of her, at once and for ever. To love her indeed, but with a love that shall be no disgrace to her, no occasion for self-despisal to myself, to be her true and faithful friend always, if ever occasion place it in my power to do her some such service as a brother might—these are my present resolves—not intentions."

He paused a moment, his eyes travelling past Adam to the infinite peace and beauty

of the cloudless vault of heaven, then went on again.

"Also, to retrieve a past injury, to reverse a cruel injury, to bring such peace as I may, to a heart that has through me made harsh acquaintanceship with sorrow . . . . no matter that in the so doing I condemn myself to a life-long bondage, to a companionship that is the symbol of a sinful and unhappy past—even as your Mignon was to me the embodiment of a pure and hopeful future."

Mr. La Mert paused again, and Adam, regarding him with a keen and unwavering scrutiny, asked himself, was this man mad enough to expect him to accept this unasked-for and astounding declaration?

Utterly unaware of the revolution that had taken place in Philip's mind, thoroughly acquainted with the reckless audacious character of the man before him, and how he was notorious for never relinquishing his pursuit of any woman who had caught his fancy until overtaken, there was about

this suddenly changed aspect of affairs, an unreality and incongruity that struck him as almost grotesque.

No longer ago than last night had Philip La Mert silently flung down the gage of defiance at his feet—not one hour ago had he been hotly pursuing Mignon—how, then, came in a breath, a moment, this sudden and miraculous conversion? Adam's silence, his glance, instantly informed the other of the incredulity that filled his mind.

"I cannot expect you to understand," said Philip with a sudden heightening of colour, and a momentary return to the old pride and haughtiness of regard and bearing, "neither can I explain—my future actions will speak for me, as no expressed words can do—nevertheless I swear to you as between man and man and in the sight of God, that henceforth your wife is sacred to me, and that never by thought, word or deed, will I do violence to her honour, and my own vow. You believe me?"

"I do," said Adam. In spite of himself, and in the teeth of all the evidence to the contrary, the accent of truth in the voice of the other carried an irresistible conviction to his mind that he felt bound to accept.

How could he tell that the day was not far distant when these words of Philip La Mert should recur to him as the veriest inspiration of the Father of Lies? That he would look back to this hour when they two stood together, and marvel that a bolt had not been loosed from heaven to strike one of them dead for the blasphemy that he feared not to take between his lips?

And now that Philip had volunteered, and Adam had accepted the assurances given by the former of future good behaviour, it might have been expected that a better feeling would exist between them, that the attitude of hostility assumed by each would give place to a more harmonious one—might have been, but was not; enemies they had been from the first day their eyes had met,

enemies they would be until death overtook them.

Each man believed himself to have sustained from the other the deepest injury that it was in his power to bestow. The one had stolen the girl's outward vows of allegiance, the other had (or so Adam believed) possessed himself of her heart; what chance, therefore, could there be of agreement between them now, or at any future time?

In neither of them was there one particle of that maudlin, sickly sentimentality, that might have impelled some men, after the foregoing scene, into a wholly weak, half-hysterical proffer of friendship. Too boldly and robustly formed for vacillation, strong and thorough in both their likes and dislikes, they know how to divide the former from the latter by the hard and fast line that our ancestors drew—that is every day becoming more and more rare in this age of mental fogs and obscurity, in which we make haste to pull

down all the grand old landmarks, and call good evil, and evil good.

We have no heartiness either in our hatred or our love in this nineteenth century of ours. We scarcely know our friends from our enemies, and instead of a wholesome liking, a vigorous dislike, we smile on all indifferently, and bide our time to give a covert thrust in the dark to the objects of our lukewarm detestation. We have so jumbled up all the good old titles for sin with those for virtue, that we have almost persuaded ourselves the former no longer exists—and are assuredly doubtful as to where the one ends and the other begins.

"There is one point," said Adam after a short pause, "on which I have to ask your forgiveness. When I found that you were paying your suit to Miss Ferrers, I protected her against you by every means in my power, for I had, as I believed, ample proof that you were not free to woo her to be your wife. Believing this, I caused to be

conveyed to her the fact that you were married."

"And yet," exclaimed Philip, frowning and looking downwards, "it is strange that, knowing something of me, you should not have heard all the circumstances—it is a very well-known story, and has been bandied from lip to lip with as shameless a frequency as the cuckoo's cry!" He laughed harshly. "At the time I first saw and loved Miss Ferrers," he went on, "I was practically a single man; my divorce suit, to which there could be but one issue, was then pending. As soon as the decree was pronounced I purposed asking Mignon to be my wife. Not wishing her to be insulted by any knowledge of the disgraceful affair, I made myself known to her, not under the name of La Mert, but of Rideout, my second name. Well, you have won—I have lost her . . . . and her loss sets me free to commit an act of reparation that I could not have done had she been mine, not yours . . . . it may be that the day

will come when I shall be grateful to you that you saved her from me . . . . but not now . . . . not now . . . ."

He repressed himself by a violent effort and went on again.

"I have one question to ask of you," he said. "Your . . . . wife exhibited excessive agitation at sight of a—body" (he shuddered) "in yonder building, that seemed to bear an extraordinary resemblance to some one whom she called—Muriel!"

The word left his lips in strange, unwilling fashion, as though it were a name familiar, yet terrible.

"What!" cried Adam, stepping back in horror. "You were not in time to prevent her seeing the ghastly sights of that accursed charnel-house?" For in the confusion and pre-occupation of his mind, he had possessed eyes and thoughts for nothing but the attitude of his wife and her lover towards each other.

"No," said Philip, looking down, "I was

not in time . . . . when I got there she seemed to be tottering on the very verge of madness . . . . She was gibbering and talking to a poor drowned creature before her, whom she called—Muriel!"

"Good God!" cried Adam, striking his forehead with his clenched hand. "What a brute—what a madman I have been!—to take so little care of her as to let her run the chance of such a fearful shock—when I have been so careful too to keep from her knowledge that there was any such place in Paris——"

For the first time his eyes turned towards the pale and wistful face in the distance that had looked in wonder at him many times, but to which La Mert's glance (although he knew all too well just where she was) had not once wandered.

"That there should be anything so fatal, so incredible," went on Adam vehemently, "that she should see a chance resemblance like that—to the creature in whom her very

life is bound up—" he paused abruptly, struck, through all the excitement that possessed him, by the expression of Philip La Mert's face.

"And that other," said Philip breathlessly, "who is she . . . . what was she to . . . . your wife?"

"They are sisters," said Adam.

Was every passion and emotion by which man is capable of being convulsed, to be experienced by Philip La Mert that day?

All that had gone before was as nothing to the last, the crowning agony that came to him then.

Recoiling before the speaker, holding up his arms as though to ward off some imminent and frightful danger, while beads of sweat gathered and stood upon his brow.

"It is false . . . ." he cried, in a low hoarse whisper, "false . . . . that they two . . . O God! . . . they two . . . out of all women upon earth should be . . . . *sisters* . . . it is monstrous . . . incredible, I say. . . "

He dashed both hands before his eyes, tore them away again, turned as one who flees from an avenging Nemesis, and mingling with the crowd, was lost to sight in a moment.

CHAPTER V.

"Enchantment
Grew drunken, and would have its head and bent."

TWO people were standing on the summit of L'Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile, looking down on the magical scene spread out below. Probably from this eminence alone, is one able to appreciate in all its magnificence the central idea that governs the architecture of Paris, and exalts it, on mere æsthetic grounds alone, above every other city in the world.

Nevertheless the name of the man who so beautified and enriched this city that he loved, is writ in water, while that of the great scourge

of his country is carved in the hearts of his people; and while the one has faded away like a breath from the surface of a mirror, the other shall live among the great ones of the earth for ever and ever.

For the latter understood the nature of the French through and through, and thus understanding, knew how to master them; even in dying, do not his subtly-conceived words speak to and thrill them for all time?

"*Je désire que mes cendres reposent sur les bords de la Seine, au milieu de ce peuple français que j'ai tant aimé.*"

And yet this manslayer on so superb and gigantic a scale, had so much of the little-mindedness and malignity of a mere cowardly murderer, that he was able to leave a legacy of ten thousand francs to the man who tried to assassinate the hero who conquered him (Napoleon) at Waterloo!

Mignon, as she gazed down on the numberless lines of light that radiated, like the jewelled spokes of some gigantic, dazzling

wheel, from every side of the building on which she stood, upon the myriad lamps that trembled over the vast *enceinte* and the ramparts beyond, as though indeed the great armies of the heavens had stepped down to scatter their fire over the breast of the city, did she not, looking upwards, behold shining far above her, the sky,

> "Over-spangled with a million
> Of little eyes as though thou wert to shed
> Over the darkest, lushest blue-bell bed,
> Handfuls of daisies—"

felt herself, in presence of the immensity all about her, to be so paltry an atom in the great scheme planned by the Creator, that for a brief space she forgot her misery even as she forgot herself, being merged into, and lost in, the silent, ineffable splendour of the night.

When we are able to recognise the great truth that we are but infinitesimal portions of the great heart of creation, that our cries, our struggles, our ambitions, will not quicken or arrest one smallest pulse of it, then some-

thing of the knowledge of the utter uselessness of our frantic efforts is borne in upon us, and unconsciously we draw a higher, purer wisdom into our souls, and catch some faint and distant echo of that divinest of all gifts—peace.

Presently she shivered, then crept a little nearer to her husband, and looking anxiously up into his face, "Adam," she said, "I have been thinking . . . . and do you know that it is all so much more *hopeful* than I thought at first; and it seems to me that if I only wait, and am quite patient, it will all come right at the last . . . . And I will be patient . . . ." she added with a half sob, "and brave. I will never *give up* again as I did yesterday . . . only when I saw *that* . . ." (her little restless hands clasped his arm more tightly) "so like, so fearfully like, I did not think I could ever pray again . . . . everything seemed to be *over*, done with . . . . and it all rose up before me like a vision, all that she must have suffered, all that she must have

gone through ere she came to be lying there so still and quiet, with the water trickling over her dead face . . . . And even now, when I *know* that it was not Muriel, I still can't keep it out of my head that perhaps Muriel is enduring all that the poor creature I saw endured, ere she found death at last . . . . And yet it is a foolish fancy, is it not?" she said, looking up into her husband's face with a wistful, tender smile, that made his heart ache for her as he saw it. "This afternoon," she went on, "I took courage to read Miss Sorel's letter over again, for the first time since that terrible day when I got news of my darling . . . . and I found in it a different meaning to the one that it had for me before; yes, I saw quite clearly that it was possible, even likely, that Miss Sorel had been mistaken, for all that she was so wise and good—for do you not say yourself that *no one* can look into another person's mind, the most that one can do is to guess at it?"

Adam, his head turned away from the

piteous scrutiny of her blue eyes, murmured some inarticulate reply.

"And so it came to me," said the girl, "all of a sudden that Miss Sorel had been quite *wrong* in her notion about Muriel, that after all there might be some explanation that she did not know of—that Muriel might have been married, only her husband did not wish it to be known just yet, and she was afraid that some wicked person or other might be trying to set me against her by telling me wicked stories, and so she asked Miss Sorel that strange question about me . . . .

"*You* did not deceive me," she said, taking one of Adam's hands and holding it fast between both her own, "and I was not sweet or good, or beautiful, like Muriel, and you would not be likely to love me so well as *she* would be loved . . . . but you took me to your heart and home, though I was so silly, and ignorant, and young, just as that other unknown man has taken my darling. . . ."

Adam shuddered . . . . he too was begin-

ning to understand many things that had seemed dark to him before, but, alas! the light that shone across the past was by no means the mild benignant one of hope.

"And so," said Mignon, sighing, "I have made up my mind not to fret about her any more, but just to *wait*—and sooner or later it will all come straight—I am sure of it."

He did not reply, but seemed lost in thought. A few moments later he spoke, but in his voice there was a hesitation very unusual with him as he said:

"You are quite sure, Mignon, that Mr. La Mert told you that what you saw . . . . *was not* Muriel, before the young artisan came whose sweetheart so strangely resembled her?"

"Of course I am sure," said Mignon, looking startled; "it was when he said so that I fainted—he told me about that poor girl *afterwards.* I did not think about it then—indeed it seemed natural to me that he should understand all about her . . . . but

I have ever since been thinking that it was —*odd*— unless he knew her by sight? Perhaps," she added, looking anxiously and eagerly into Adam's face, "he had seen her somewhere before; it was not a face one could easily forget, and she may have met him in Dublin, or been his friend's wife. . . ."

"His friend's wife . . . ." It was well that her husband had turned aside, and that she could not see the expression in his eyes. He was recalling a story he had heard long ago, of Mr. La Mert and something that had happened in Ireland.

"And I have been wondering," she went on feverishly, "how soon we are likely to see him again. He may be able to give me news of her—just to think of it! and I have been so careless as to let him go away without asking him a single question! Do you think we are likely to see him again before we go away—or after?"

God forgive him if, as he looked down on that imploring childish face, he thought he

found something more in it than mere anxiety to see this man again for her sister's sake. . . . if he read there a restless longing, an unsatisfied yearning of which she was too ignorant to be herself fully aware . . . . nay, if he saw trembling on her lips and in the depths of her eyes the dawn of the soul that he believed to be as yet unawakened, but that he had so fondly and faithfully believed would sooner or later awaken to *him* . . . . no other. . . .

"You are not likely to see him again," he said quietly. No, it was not probable, he thought, that Philip La Mert would again desire to have speech with Mignon. . . . He was a more hardened man than Adam believed him to be, were he capable of meeting her glance and replying to her questions concerning her sister.

"But Paris is not so big a place but that one might run up against somebody else," she said, with a very perceptible fall in her voice, "and I dare say he came for more than

just a day or two. If we keep our eyes well open we may catch a glimpse of him yet, for we shall not be going away yet awhile."

"But I thought you were in such a hurry to get back to Lilytown," he said; "it was only yesterday morning that you said——"

"Only you see," she said, interrupting him, "I did not know what was going to happen—that I should see *him*—"

Now, if there be any parallel to the extraordinary and perverse dislike (of which I have before made mention) that a woman has to being *called* a woman, it is that of the objection a man has to hearing his wife or sweetheart speak of any one under the sun save himself as *him*.

Adam drew his hand suddenly out of his wife's clasp; he was angry; worse still, he had lost his patience, but he was too thoroughly manly and chivalrous to vent his irritation on this slender, defenceless girl, who had so great a claim upon his love and forbearance.

She looked at him in surprise, not knowing

in what way she had displeased him. . . . To be innocent had its drawbacks; had she possessed experience she would have discovered the rock of offence, and in future steered clear of it. Only in that case she would not have been the Mignon that he loved. Well, men are hard to please, and they expect, and oftener than not they demand, utterly irreconcilable qualities.

"Mignon," he said a moment later in his usual tone, "I have some good news for you that I received this morning. And yet it is almost inhuman to say that it is good, although Mr. Sorel is your enemy——"

"What of him?" cried Mignon breathlessly, then, suddenly sobered; "he is not—*dead?*" she said.

"No—not dead; but grief and excitement have so worked upon him as to render him insane."

"Then there is no chance," cried Mignon, clasping her hands in despair, "of our ever getting Rosemary. You said it was not

likely that he would wish to retain the house, and that by setting an agent to watch, and giving *him* instructions to take the house in his own name and transfer it to you afterwards, Mr. Sorel would never suspect we had got it, but *now*——"

"But now," said Adam, "the thing has passed beyond possibilities, Mignon, it is *done*. Mr. Sorel's next-of-kin, a shrewd man of business, without an ounce of romance in his composition, upon whom devolved the task of settling all Mr. Sorel's affairs, when he found from Prue how matters lay, that Miss Sorel had kept the school against her brother's wishes, and from the landlord that the lease had expired in June, but was to have been renewed on Miss Sorel's return, he simply declined committing any such folly in the existing state of Mr. Sorel's health, placed the matter in the hands of the very agent I had put to watch, accepted a sum for fixtures, etc., caused to be removed to the How all personal belongings of Miss Sorel, and the

whole thing is settled. I have written to town to have certain things sent in to make the place decent, and we will set out, if you are ready, Mignon, the day after to-morrow."

She did not immediately speak; she was dumb beneath the weight of joy his words gave her, then she took both his hands between both her own, and kissed them passionately.

"To be able to watch and wait for her always—like that!" she said, "to be *sure* of never missing her, come when she will by night or day, and it is all your doing, all. . . . . You are good," she said with almost a sob in her voice, "and I am not worthy of you, though indeed, *indeed* I will try to be. . . ."

"Do not!" he cried almost harshly as he took her in his arms, "do you hear me? I forbid it, Mignon—only try!—is it so very hard a thing, sweetheart, to *love* me?"

She shrank from his embrace, his words; it was not often that he permitted himself the

folly of either. "Love" was a word that he had hitherto been shy of using with the girl, and now he said to himself that he had been mad to use it; she would be scared and ill at ease with him. He knew also that when the first seedling shoot of that which in time should become a stately flower begins to stir in the warm brown earth, it is folly indeed to seize and drag it into daylight, seeking to wrest from it its yet unborn secret of colour and perfume. Yet it was difficult not to believe that the germ developed but slowly, slowly, nay, there were times when he doubted if it were there at all, and, in that case, how long and weary would be the waiting for that which should never come?

"And now we will go home and begin to pack up," said Mignon feverishly, and turning to depart without one backward look at the magnificent panorama that had but now so electrified her, "only," she added, stopping short as though a thought had suddenly

struck her, "we shall not have many chances of seeing Mr. La Mert again if we go the day after to-morrow; nevertheless" (her face brightened, for a moment she looked once again the joyous, happy-hearted girl of a month ago) "it is more than possible that we shall run up against him some day in Lilytown!"

CHAPTER VI.

"There's not a breath
Will mingle kindly with the meadow air,
Till it has panted round and stolen a share
Of passion from the heart!"

"O PRUE!" cried Mignon, taking one flying leap out of the carriage straight into Prue's arms, "it is worth all—*all* the disagreeableness of getting married and going away, to come back to you and Rosemary again!"

"Hush, Miss Mignon!—I beg pardon, *ma'am*," said Prue, with a hasty glance at Mr. Montrose, but reassured by his unruffled countenance, "O! it's glad I am to see your bonnie face again"—she held the girl away

from her, regarding her with fondest love and pride—"for long and dreary the time has been without you!"

"Prue," said Mignon solemnly, as they went along the familiar approach to the house together, "are you quite sure that we've not all been *dreaming?* Do you know," she grew pale, and stopped short, "that I cannot help fancying I have been away for the holidays, and that I shall find *her* standing just inside the door?"

"No, no, Miss Mignon," said Prue sadly, "you'll just see two new maids, for cook left a while ago, and there's a bit change in the house."

And indeed when Mignon stepped over the threshold, she found that all was not just as it used to be.

From the school window had for ever disappeared the dismal wire blind that had been the despair of the young and idle male population of Lilytown, and in its place hung curtains of crimson silk and white lace, while

through the open window came the perfume of roses and mignonette. Prue's careful formal fingers had also arranged nosegays wherever she could find a place to set them, for did she not know the passion her little mistress had for those delicate ornaments of creation, that are oftentimes so infinitely better worth looking at than human beings?

The coloured maps still hung on the wall, in one corner of the room stood the globe over which her weary fingers had travelled so many, many times, but the desks, forms and black-board had all disappeared to make place for such pleasant handsome furniture as beseemed the dining-room of a gentleman who was bringing home his young wife. She ran into the drawing-room. That was also a curious mixture of past and present; for though the bunch of painted flowers still hung upon the wall, and Diana was busy blowing an imaginary horn in the distance, some good fairy had been at work and turned

the schoolish chilly room into a bower of blue and white, that must have been specially chosen, one would say, with regard to the character of Mignon's beauty.

She was standing in the middle of the room, herself the prettiest thing in it, or so thought Adam, who was silently watching her from the doorway, when she spied him and ran forward.

"You like it?" he said simply, and smoothing her ruffled, dust-powdered hair away from her blue eyes——

"Yes," she said softly, "I like it." One little fluttering hand stole timidly up and rested on his breast, then standing on tiptoe, she lifted her lips—it was not far—to his, with as light, as kind, as affectionate a kiss, as though he had been her brother or her father, or anything on earth but her lover or her husband.

"And indeed I like *you*," she said heartily; "I think I grow to like you better and better every day; in time I do believe I

shall get almost as fond of you as I am of Prue!"

His arms slackened their hold upon her; she stood alone.

"And when *she* comes," continued Mignon, looking about her with a beaming countenance of utter delight, "how happy we shall be, to be sure!"

"And until then?" he said quietly.

"O!" she said, her face falling somewhat, "I have not thought much about it; but with so much to look forward to we can't be very *dull*, can we?"

When, some half-an-hour later, Adam found himself seated at one end of the table, and Mignon, in a fresh muslin gown with a rose in her belt at the other, he said to himself that he was an ingrate to fortune in that he received her favours with such scanty thanks. Only to think that Mignon was *there*, that she would be at his table always; that whenever he came home this little shape would be within reach of his hand and glance of his

eye, that he would never more be tormented by stolen and hasty peeps that only left him more hungry than they found him, that for to-day, to-morrow, for ever, she was safely his wife, unloving may be, but still, *his own*.

"Mignon," said Adam, when the servant had finally left the room, and the girl was half way through her grapes, "has it ever occurred to you that I have got a father?"

"No," she said, "I have never thought about it"—and it was true. In the intensely selfish isolation of her sorrow she had thought but little of Adam, still less of his belongings.

Adam left his place and came and sat down beside her.

"And have you never heard, Mignon," he said seriously, "that sometimes fathers do not like their sons to marry, especially when the sons have not asked their advice?"

"Is he *angry?*" said Mignon, laying down

a berry in dismay. "Will he come round here and *scold* us?"

"He is far too dignified to *scold*," said Adam, laughing, "but I expect he will be—angry."

"Let us go and ask him to forgive us," said Mignon promptly, "and I will tell him how it all happened, and that it was every bit my fault. He couldn't possibly blame *you* for it!"

"Poor little sinner!" said Adam gently, "you will make a great confession of misdeeds, will you not, and I shall stand quietly by and listen to the same. Meanwhile I had better prepare him gently. So in half an hour's time, Mignon, I shall go and tell him."

He spoke less as a beloved son who is about to sue for pardon, than as a man who goes to announce a fact, and assert his right to self-government.

"And then will he come and see me?" said Mignon, laying one little anxious, sticky hand

on Adam's arm. "Do you think that he will say wicked—*things,* as that other old man did?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Adam in horror. "And do not fear," he added, "but that I shall know how to protect my own. I shall take you to see him to-morrow morning—when you will also make the acquaintance of —Flora."

"But you said she was married?"

"So she is."

"And does she live with your father?"

"She is paying him a visit."

"With her husband?"

"Yes—Colin is there."

His voice took that tone which one man never uses in speaking of another, unless he heartily likes him.

"And she is quite young?" said Mignon.

"Let me see," said Adam. "She was married at eighteen, and Taffy must be eight years old by now—I suppose she is somewhere about seven and twenty."

"Then she is quite old," said Mignon, disconsolately, "only two years younger than you are! Is she pretty?"

"Some people think so."

"And good-tempered?"

"So her admirers say."

"But," said Mignon, blankly, "I did not know that when people were married they had *admirers?*"

"Do they not?" he said, looking keenly at the girl, "well, I suppose Flora is an exception to the rule, for she has several!"

"And are you very fond of her?" said Mignon, puzzled by a certain unaccountable hardness in his manner.

"I am not fond of her at all."

"Not *fond* of her?" cried Mignon, staring at him, "your own sister, the only one you have—just the same to you, as Muriel is to me?"

"No," said Adam, "I am *not* fond of her; on the contrary," he threw his head back

and looked ceilingwards half ruefully, half impatiently, "I am afraid there cannot be the smallest doubt in the world that I do not like her at all!"

CHAPTER VII.

"With unladen breasts,
Save of blown self-applause, they proudly mount
To their spirit's perch, their being's high account;
Their tip-top nothings, their dull skies, their thrones."

"NOW then!" said Flora, "put your hands behind your backs, and for your lesson to-day learn *that:*

"'A frog he would a-wooing go,
Whether his mother would let him or no,
Heigho! says Roly.'"

Two childish voices repeated the ancient nursery classic with a readiness that would have been laudable and surprising, had they now uttered it for the first time.

"And what does wooing mean?" said Flora, surveying the atoms before her with invincible gravity.

"Getting married," said Taffy.

"Kissing," said Colin, solemnly.

Their mother broke into a sudden peal of laughter. Her laughter was like herself, abundant; for nature had assuredly not found herself skimped for material, when she created Flora. No, nor for colour, for though all about her was a great blaze of scarlet, yellow, and blue flowers, her own tints in no ways suffered by comparison, for they were every whit as vivid, and saucy, and daring as theirs.

"There is," says a famous French writer, "but one way in which a woman can be handsome, but a hundred thousand ways in which she can be pretty." This being translated, means, I take it, that the devil's beauty of extreme youth, a joyous mood, a becoming gown, the neighbourhood of a favoured lover, or any other pleasurable

and fugitive emotion is able to transform a negatively plain woman into a positively pretty one.

Now Flora's good looks in no way depended on any of the adventitious aids before enumerated, nevertheless it was a fact that she just missed being extremely handsome, through the one feature of the face that is so often the stumbling-block over which female beauty trips—the nose.

Lovely eyes are plentiful as blackberries, lovelier perhaps among the humble ones of the earth than the great; cherry lips are as often to be met with as the pretty fools to whom they would seem to especially belong, but—a handsome nose! Is there any man who can reckon among all his acquaintance more than a couple of perfectly shaped proboscides? So far as my own experience goes, I have never discovered a phenomenon of this kind, save on the countenances of one or two intensely irritable people.

"*Un petit nez retroussé bouleverse les lois*

d'un empire," but when there is no empire to overturn, Chloe is apt to grow dissatisfied with what Providence has seen fit to send her, and to glance with envy at the classic features of Amaryllis, her rival, and Flora would have cheerfully parted with one of her own plump fingers, if by so doing she could have made that pretty little disdainful nose of hers straight.

With women Flora did not find favour; they affected to consider her coarse, but that she was not, only her splendid physique and robust vigour of constitution made her antagonistic to, and intolerant of, those lymphatic and half-starved souls, who were not able to take a good free breath of anything, whether of life, air, or beauty, without wincing and shivering, and suffering acute moral indigestion afterwards.

There was about this young matron a bold, gay *bonhomie,* that might be no more than a mere animal delight in existence, the outcome of a sensuous and a pleasure-loving

temperament, but, on the other hand, and on this point opinions were extremely diverse, be no less an admirable quality, than solid Christian charity and goodness of heart. Complexion, constitution, and digestion alike precluded the possibility of her being persistently ill-humoured, and to do her justice she seldom was, unless the admiration and attention, that were food and drink to her, were diverted on their way to her by a fair and skilful sister bandit. Nevertheless on occasion she was capable of entertaining for certain people a strong dislike, and of these persons her brother Adam was one. Her nerves, too, were excellent, enabling her to bear the discordant shrieks of a paroquet who was strutting on the lawn before her with perfect equanimity and indifference.

The two boys who faced her had not a tithe of their mother's good looks. Well, we take incredible pains with the breed of animals, we eradicate certain vices and blemishes, and labour long and patiently to

transmit certain perfections and qualities, but with that of our men and women, the rulers of the universe, do we ever concern ourselves at all?

We let them mate anyhow, whereas if the same pains were taken with them that are expended on the beasts, a race of men and women would spring up, strong, brave and beautiful as were the fabled gods of old.

"And pray," said Flora, with mock solemnity, "what is the difference between kissing and getting married?"

"Nurse got *married*," said Taffy thoughtfully, "but we never saw anybody kiss *her*—and Anne gets kissed, but she doesn't get married—" Here the infant mind paused on the threshold of a definition, and could get no farther on its way.

"So Anne gets kissed!" said Flora coolly, "and pray who kisses Anne?"

Taffy, who had all the elements of a first-rate sneak about him, was about to reply, when a sharp and sudden pinch in his rear

from Colin the Younger's small hand caused him to stammer and hesitate.

"Now, then!" said Flora imperiously, "who kisses Anne?"

But Taffy's enforced indecision had, for the nonce, saved the recital of Anne's delinquencies, for at this moment there appeared upon the scene no less a person than—Mr. Montrose.

"So, so! Lessons, I perceive," he said benignly, yet irritably, as his eyes fell on his grandsons; "nevertheless, if not on any subject of moment, my dear Flora" (he bowed gracefully towards his daughter), "perhaps you will do me the favour to dismiss them—as there are matters upon which—in short, you will understand, I am sure—"

"Certainly, father," said Flora, and at a signal from her the boys vanished. Mr. Montrose drew out his watch and looked at it.

"Five minutes to eleven," he said solemnly, "in five minutes they will be here."

He replaced his watch with slow deliberation, then commenced to pace the gravel walk with steps that he was evidently at considerable pains to keep within the measured bounds that he had long ago laid down as suitable to a man of his years and moral excellence. For, unlike some persons who are quite above taking the trouble to convince the world of the validity of their pretensions to perfection, he was ever trying to act up to his own standard of what he thought right and becoming. Thus he never lost his self-consciousness, beholding, not the people he addressed, but the attitude he himself maintained towards them, whether of the attentive host, the affectionate yet severe parent, or the generous friend; in short, finding in everybody a reflection of—himself.

"They won't come any the sooner for your fidgeting, father," said Flora tranquilly, as she inserted a stitch or two in her lace-work, and meditated on Anne's osculatory escapades.

The colour in Mr. Montrose's face deepened perceptibly; he continued his walk, but with an air of offence. For if there be one thing on earth that irritates a fussy person more than another, it is to be *told* that he is fussy, since in his own mind he invariably sees himself the only collected person present.

"I am not aware of fidgeting," he said stiffly, "and I am sorry to be compelled to remark (you being a married woman and no longer subject to my authority) that there is —ah—a tone of *levity* about your whole reception of this unfortunate affair that seriously displeases me. When your brother came here last night, after a most unaccountable absence of some weeks, and announced with a coolness highly unbecoming in so young a man, that he was actually *married*, in what way did you receive the intelligence? With indifference and an epigram! Now that I display a pardonable impatience to behold my daughter-in-law, I am told that—I fidget!"

"I beg your pardon, father," said Flora, "but when Adam walked in and told us that he was married, at the same time volunteering not the slightest information as to the lady's antecedents or surroundings, a vision suddenly rose up before me of what she would probably be like that quite upset my gravity——"

She paused expressively, and shrugged her shoulders.

"You have not, then, a high opinion of your brother's taste?" said Mr. Montrose, coming to a full-stop before his daughter, and handling his eye-glasses nervously.

"Adam the gardener's taste!" said Flora slightingly; "if he has married according to *his taste,* father, it is not difficult to imagine what that will be. Probably this young woman is some gardener's daughter with whom he has become enamoured while pursuing the congenial occupation of helping to pot out her father's herbs and bulbs!"

"God bless my soul!" said Mr. Montrose with much earnestness, all his little pompous air utterly put to flight for the moment, "you surely don't conceive such a thing possible! With all your brother's peculiarities and odd choice of amusements, he would not, I hope and believe, so far forget himself as to introduce into our family circle a young person who—who——"

He paused, utterly overcome by the visions of the "young person" suggested by Flora's words.

"There is no knowing what Adam will do when once he takes an idea into his head," said his sister. "So long as he himself were satisfied, he would not care a button what you or I or anybody else might think of the matter."

Not often did Flora venture to make so bold a speech as the foregoing, and now she glanced from under her long eyelashes to see how it told.

Mr. Montrose was irritably glancing across

to where, in dim perspective, was visible that trim and well-stocked kitchen garden in which Adam had dug, and delved, and accomplished his destiny.

"Your brother is his own master," he said stiffly; "owing to your departed mother's injudicious bequest to him, he is in no way dependent upon me, and although it is true I might show my displeasure by refusing to receive him and his wife, still—a family scandal" (he made a gesture of disgust, much as though he had lighted on some noxious and disgusting insect) "has always been my special abhorrence; besides" (here he raised his eyes to the surrounding walls), "how is it possible to be on unfriendly terms with a son who actually lives next door to you?"

"How on earth he got there is a mystery to me!" said Flora, yawning; "the servants say it is a school or something of the kind—perhaps the schoolmistress improves the shining hour by taking in boarders while her pupils are away!"

But Mr. Montrose was not attending—for the first time in his life he felt himself to be in a dilemma.

Hitherto, he had under all circumstances been equally pleased and satisfied with himself in all that he did, and with unruffled dignity had acted up to what he conceived to be a right and proper standard of excellence, and since he was never called upon to fill any situation with which his previous experiences did not enable him to deal, he had been saved from even the mere suspicion of the barrenness of his resources.

Now, suddenly confronted with an unexpected exigency, he was entirely at a loss how to meet it, and in this disagreeable revelation to himself of his own helplessness and incapacity, felt an added cause of resentment against the person who had been its occasion. As a Roman father, renouncing his offspring in well-rounded periods, and enunciating highly moral sentiments from a lofty height of virtue, Mr. Montrose would have been

quite in his element; he would even have figured handsomely as the stately yet condescending parent who received a privileged and duly approved of daughter-in-law into his bosom; but as a parent who disliked a match concerning which he was yet by circumstances compelled to spare the thunders of his righteous indignation, he felt himself to be placed in a false position, from whence he knew not how to extricate himself with dignity.

"And Miss McClosky is coming here to-day!" he said at last. "A most estimable young woman who would have suited him in every way, who is, so far as her maidenly modesty permits one to judge, by no means indifferent to your brother, and to whom, if I am not much mistaken, this news will come with as great a shock as it does to us."

"Poor Phillis!" said Flora not unkindly, "I wish she had not been coming; it would

have been so much better to write and tell her; but—unless at the eleventh hour some accident happens to prevent her—she will come!"

Mr. Montrose put out his hands in deprecation, and resumed his measured walk.

Across the silence that had fallen between father and daughter, came the cool splash of a fountain, and the distant laughter of Taffy and Colin the Younger, who were evidently having a good time somewhere out of sight. Although the morning was one of intolerable heat, in this corner of the garden were shade and coolness in plenty.

"They are late," remarked Flora presently, laying down her work and regarding it critically. "Doubtless the bride is arraying herself in her Sunday gown, and Adam, poor man, is doing his best to tone down the colours a little. Or perhaps—" she paused suddenly, her lips closed, then opened again in a little quick gasp of astonishment, as she

looked up and saw her brother and the girl, who came stepping towards her by his side.

Here was no gardener's daughter, but a woman in whose veins ran blood every whit as blue as her own, in whose bearing was a pride of race even greater than her own, moreover who was possessed of one supreme advantage that she herself lacked, the freshness and incomparable bloom of extreme youth.

If there was a moment of hesitation it did not proceed from those whose province it may have been to display it, for Adam, leading Mignon forward, "Father," he said, "this is my wife."

Something that did not often make itself felt, stirred in the old man's selfish yet not unkindly heart, as he looked down on the girl's gentle face, and felt her slight hand close upon his. Perhaps there was more of human nature in him than he suspected, or some thrill of healthy young life passed from her palm to his and unconsciously freshened

him, yet when he did speak, it was only to add one more to those countless billions of unanswered "How do you do's?" of which English air suffers a plethora, and that are about as reasonable as the habit that still prevails in some parts of the globe, of rubbing one's nose against a friend's, or offering him a taste of one's own choice and particular lump of salt.

"And this is my sister, Mrs. Dundas," said Adam, turning to Flora, who, with a very perceptible increase of colour, had risen to greet her new sister-in-law.

"How do you do?" she said in her turn, but the meaningless words had a jovial, gay ring in them, and Mignon, turning her eyes from Mr. Montrose's uninteresting, not to say stupid, countenance, to Flora's blooming, good-humoured one, was instinctively attracted towards her.

"This seat is not a large one, and I am not a small person," said Flora, laughing, "nevertheless I think that it will hold two?"

And with a gesture of invitation she sank into the wooden contrivance from whence she had risen.

"What a lovely garden!" said Mignon involuntarily, and mentally comparing this smiling Eden with the wilderness on the other side of the wall.

"Is not yours as good?" said Flora, who was thinking, "How this chit's blue eyes will put out my grey ones!"

"No," said Mignon, "it is bare and ugly, and though I have planted lots of things, somehow they never seem to *come up* right!"

"Oh!" said Flora, glancing at her brother (and it was significant of the relations existing between the brother and sister that they had hitherto made each other no sort of greeting), "Adam will soon change all that! He will rout the slugs, pickle the snails, and keep you in flowers and vegetables all the year round—in short, I believe that at a pinch he would not be above doing a little—weeding!"

She flashed her eyes full on Adam's (very

like her own, by the way, in shape and colour, but how different in expression) with an insolence that he was not slow to appreciate; but Mignon, believing this to be an intentional allusion to a matter of which she could never think without intense shame and vexation, blushed furiously, and with the unwise, impetuous courage of youth, exclaimed, "And why should he not? It is a very right thing to do, and a very *kind* one! And I was very *much* obliged to him for making those shabby old garden walks look so beautiful!"

"*He did!*" said Flora, opening her eyes to their utmost extent; "well, I knew Cupid did odd things sometimes, but—*weeding!*"

"I am not aware," said Mr. Montrose, addressing Flora in a tone of dignified rebuke, "that there is anything derogatory to a young man in the act of weeding—on the contrary, it appears to me an earnest of industry, and industry in the young is a very excellent quality. There is moreover," here he bowed

gracefully towards Mignon, "a delicacy in the idea of a lover tending his mistress's flowers, a poetry in the image of him presenting her with a cluster that he has preserved from untoward influences—"

"But he wasn't a lover," said Mignon unexpectedly.

"Not a lover!" cried Flora, "and what was he then, pray?"

"I thought he was the gardener," said Mignon in an exculpatory tone.

"There!" said Flora triumphantly, "did I not always tell you so, that you *looked* like a gardener? After all, the nickname I gave you was well chosen!"

He glanced across at her contemptuously, then back again at his wife.

"But it was nothing *to do* with his looks," said Mignon hotly, "it was all my stupid mistake and—and his coming over the wall that morning."

"Over the wall!" echoed Mr. Montrose, in deepest bass tones of horror; "do I under-

stand you to say that my son came *over the wall?*"

"To be sure!" said Mignon, nodding, "after snails—at least I supposed so then, as there was nothing else—only you see he found —*me!*"

"And may I ask," said Mr. Montrose, his countenance becoming positively vacuous under the influence of the amazement that filled him, "if my son's intrusion into your garden was the occasion of your *first* introduction to each other?"

"The very first!" said Mignon, nodding again. "I just asked him his name, you know, and he told me—and that's how it all happened!"

"*Good* heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Montrose, dropping his eye-glass in a spasm of outraged decorum, "and what did your people—your father—your mother say?"

"I have no father and no mother!"

"Your nearest relatives then—your lawful guardians?"

"Haven't got any," said Mignon, sighing, "I've nobody in the world but one person and Prue—and Adam," she added, as an after-thought, glancing up at him with so cold and kind a glance, as to convince Flora that for whatever reason this mysterious and candid young lady had married Adam, it certainly was not for love.

"And who is *Prue?*" said Mr. Montrose, "a female relative, I presume?"

"She is a housemaid," said Mignon.

"But," said Mr. Montrose, almost gasping, "your *chaperon* at your interviews with my son—there must surely have been *some one?*"

"There was nobody," said Mignon, "unless"—she added meditatively, "you would call Bumble a person!"

"And who is—ah—Bumble?" said Mr. Montrose, his hopes reviving at the mention of so eminently respectable a name.

"A fowl," said Mignon; "Adam used to help me catch him—or try to!"

"Is it the punishment of mine enemy, that he should marry a fool?" thought Flora, glancing at Adam, who stood, bareheaded, listening to his young wife's disclosures as calmly as though she were presenting those unwritten vouchers of respectability that society expects and demands. And yet no man living was better aware than he, of how severe is the world's condemnation of any intrigue, howsoever pure in motive and intent, that traverses its laws.

"*Good* heavens!" said Mr. Montrose again, his usual noble panoply of words utterly failing him, and reverting unconsciously to the simple and forcible language that he may have used in the less distinguished and ornate days of his youth.

"Are you angry?" said Mignon, looking attentively at the vacuous fleshy face before her, in which there was not one line that said, "I have suffered, I have conquered, I *know*," —"but you must not blame Adam, for it was *every bit* my fault that we got married—you

see, I was so lonely, and poor, and miserable, with no one but Prue to take care of me, and he was so sorry for me!"

"Not because he was sorry for you," said Adam quietly, "but because he loved you."

"So, so!" said Flora to herself, "you love her, do you, my model brother? Take care that I don't find out a way through her of paying off some very old scores."

"In my young days," said Mr. Montrose, recovering his usual stately flow of language, "it was not usual for a young woman to marry a young man, because he expressed himself sorry for her—on the contrary, I may say that the whole process of courtship (resulting in matrimony) was an extremely gradual and delicate one, extending over a very considerable space of time. First came a proper and admiring regard, then a heedful and respectful approach on the part of the gentleman (with the cognizance and full approval of his family) to the lady, then a duly considered and well-digested declaration of

love, followed by a period of anxious suspense on the part of the gentleman, of modest hesitation on hers, after which, if she answered him in the affirmative, there ensued a decent and enjoyable interval of courtship, and finally a marriage celebrated in the presence of the assembled relatives of the bride and bridegroom."

"Then I'm afraid," said Mignon, shaking her head with an air of conviction, "that our courtship was hopelessly *wrong* from beginning to end! There was no asking anybody's permission, no suspense (I said Yes the minute he asked me); and as to having a lot of relations to see us married, why we had not got one between us!"

"I don't think that you can mean that," said Mr. Montrose rebukingly. "I should be quite sorry to think that you really mean us to understand you accepted my son without a moment's hesitation; it would augur a curious lack of delicacy that I should deeply regret to discover in you. There must have been

a period of hesitation, of maidenly — ah——"

He paused, the right word not having presented itself, and he being of so conscientious a turn of mind, that he would rather keep his audience waiting five minutes than affront it with one not exactly suited to the occasion.

Unfortunately it often happens that while the proper noun, adjective, or what-not is being sought, the vagrant mind of the expectant auditor sets off with a skip in search of other pabulum, so that when Mr. Montrose had satisfied his critical taste, it was to discover that Mignon's whole attention was given to the paroquet, who had been for the last few moments viciously regarding the pink ribbons in Flora's mob-cap as though he meditated taking a bit out of them.

"Self-examination," said Mr. Montrose, his glance wandering from one to another, in that search of a home that is so ludicrous to the indifferent, so painful to the sympathetic observer—"*Self-examination*," said Mr. Mon-

trose, raising his voice a little and growing very red in the face.

"Ha! ha! ha!" went the parrot in an ecstasy of mirth, and, alas! whether it were the force of that godless bird's example, or the provocation of a certain something in Flora's eye, Mignon broke into a peal of laughter that astounded Mr. Montrose as much as though she had suddenly hopped up, and dealt him a facetious dig in the ribs.

He began to think that there were worse things about this young person than making love over a garden wall, and saying "yes" the moment she was asked in marriage.

"I am not aware," he said majestically, "that I have said anything extraordinarily ludicrous—still I am sure I am always happy to amuse——"

So saying, and wishful to mark his sense of Mignon's impropriety by a very proper haughtiness of bearing, he stepped back a pace or two, when, alas! that little imp who

ever seems to be at hand to make a mock of dignities, caused him to stumble over a foot-stool in such wise that he found himself seated with excessive harshness on a wooden chair that stood hard by.

Even Mignon felt the occasion to be too awful for laughter, much less smiles, so sat in a scarlet agony, biting her lips and puckering her forehead into a frown in her violent efforts to preserve a decent gravity; nevertheless, as Mr. Montrose glanced from her to his daughter, whose nose rested on her lace-work, and from his daughter to Adam, who had carefully turned his head away, he felt burning within him the righteous anger historically supposed to be cherished by wise men for fools.

What was there to laugh at, he would like to know? *He* would not have laughed at any one under the same circumstances; on the contrary he would have felt and expressed sympathy. There was to him something extremely coarse in these repressed manifesta-

tions of mirth, and indeed it is one of the hardest problems on earth to decide where humour ends, and levity begins, where our subtle and keen appreciation of the incongruities and inconsistencies of human nature deteriorates into a bold and irreverent license that does us an infinite discredit.

At this moment, and surely no winged Mercury of good tidings was ever more welcome, a footman noiselessly approached, and appearing in their midst, handed to Flora a telegram.

She bowed in apology to Mignon, opened the missive, read and handed it to her father.

"What an extraordinary thing," she said dryly, "Mr. McClosky has fallen ill—and can't spare his daughter! (Has a little bird whispered the news?)" she added in an aside audible only to Mignon.

Meanwhile, the paroquet, abandoning his intentions on Flora's ribbons, and perhaps feeling certain memories of the tropical

climate from whence he had been torn in his youth awakened in him by the sight of James's canary-coloured livery, at this moment elected to make a sudden dash at the man's arm and swarm up his shoulder. James, neglecting in his flurry to lift his shoulder for the bird's support, the latter, feeling himself to be slipping, laid hold of the man's ear, to which he clung like grim death, while the luckless victim, not daring to utter a sound before his master, leaped at least a foot in the air with anguish. I wonder what unseemly impulse is that which sets us smiling when we see injuries of a ludicrous character inflicted upon others? why we think it an exquisite joke when, at the pantomime, one clown gives another a sounding crack on the pate, and why we feel our pulses pleasantly quickened when the villain of the piece receives the trouncing he so richly merits? Mr. Montrose, who was a stranger to self-analysis, and only beheld himself as that which he was not, could not for the life

of him have explained why, when Adam had interfered, and James departed a sadder if not a wiser man, he should have had a far less vivid consciousness of his own wrongs than was his before the episode occurred, and even be equal to discussing the subject of Miss McClosky's non-arrival with his usual dignity.

Not that he would have retained his irritation long, for it takes such a tremendous effort of inagination on the part of a stupid man to convince him that you are laughing at him, that he is only too glad to dismiss it, and revert to his usual consciousness of perfectibility with solid satisfaction and comfort.

"And who is Miss McClosky?" said Mignon, presently.

"Who is she?" said Flora, "well, she is Miss McClosky! Though if she could have had her own way, she would be—somebody else!"

"But how could she be that?" said Mignon, much puzzled.

"Ask Adam!" said his sister.

Mignon looked at him, trying to understand, then all at once a light flashed upon her.

"*I* know!" she said, clapping her hands, "Miss McClosky was in love with Adam, or he was in love with her?"

"Yes," said Flora, grave and amused, "it was one of the two!"

"Were you *very* fond of her?" said Mignon to her husband, without one flicker of colour in the cool delicate cheeks whence the blushes had long ago faded.

"But he married you, not Miss McClosky!" said Flora.

"People don't always marry the ones they like best," said Mignon with a look in her blue eyes that struck Adam like a blow, and gave birth to fifty hitherto formless suspicions in Flora's busy brain.

"And now, Mignon, if you are ready, we will go," said Adam; and the girl stood up and put her hand in Flora's.

"I hope we shall be good friends," said the

latter in her hearty, ringing voice, "although we *are* relations, and *do* live on opposite sides of the wall! I won't inflict myself upon you too often, but I'll come—sometimes."

"Come *often*," said Mignon impressively, "come twice, three times every day if you are able, for oh! though I was as dull as dull could be before I got married, I am ten thousand times duller *now*!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"Pleasure is oft a visitant, yet pain
Clings cruelly to us like the gnawing sloth
On the deer's tender haunches."

"ARE you very busy?" said Mignon, putting her head in at the half-opened door of the room that now went by the name of Adam's study, but retreating when she saw how he sat, his head buried in his hands, at a large table covered with books.

"I am not too busy to attend to you," he said, coming forward, and leading her in.

"Where will you sit?" he added, looking about him in some perplexity, for every chair

was piled as high with dusty tomes as was the table.

"Are you doing *lessons?*" said Mignon, looking about her with considerable awe as she sat down on the big easy-chair that he had swept clear of its contents and placed for her; "why I thought—I thought——"

"You thought that because a man gets married he leaves off learning anything?" said Adam, laughing.

"No," she said, still looking about her, "but I had a notion, an impression, that you never did anything but gardening!"

"To garden is the occupation of my leisure hours," he said; "I have periods of work as well, Mignon. Has it never occurred to you to wonder how I managed to amuse myself during the many hours a day that you are working, or gossiping with Prue?"

She looked across at him with a sudden, quick compunction—no—it had never occurred to her to wonder what he might, or might not do, so thoroughly had she been

engrossed by her own thoughts, hopes, and fears.

"Has it been lonely for you," she said, "all by yourself? Do you come and read these dusty, stupid books because you have nobody to *speak* to? You see," she went on, drawing a little nearer, and looking at him with anxious, gentle consideration, "it is not a thing to get used to all at once—a husband, and sometimes I forget *all about you!* Do you know that one morning I actually got up early because I thought that it was my morning to practise before breakfast, and only when I was walking past your door, recollected I was *married?*"

"You will get more used to it in time," he said encouragingly, "perhaps—who knows?—forget to learn your gospel and collect as you did last Saturday night, for Sunday!"

"But *that* was because I had taken off my wedding ring when I washed my hands, and forgotten to put it on again," said Mignon hastily; "you see it is so bright and new and

pretty, it would be a thousand pities to spoil it!"

Yes, that was what a woman's badge of life-long duty and devotion was to her, no more and no less than a pretty shining toy.

"And these books," she said, touching one of the heavy tomes before her, "what are they? geography? history? mathematics?"

"Something far more serious and disagreeable," he said, "law!"

"You are studying it?" she exclaimed, looking at him with respect; "and why do you do that?"

"Because," he said, "to live one must eat, Mignon, and to eat, costs money; and if one has not a great deal, why then one must do one's best to earn it!"

"But have you not got plenty?" said Mignon in surprise. "Do you mean to say that you have got to *work* for it?"

"I intend to do so," he said, "but until now, Mignon, I have been somewhat idle—

indeed for the past two months before our marriage I never opened a book or a paper—though I am afraid it will be a long business, this making money, and that I shall be an old man before I begin to grow rich!"

"But I have got some money," said Mignon triumphantly, "oh, a great deal, and I can draw it out whenever I please; and you shall have it all, every penny of it, to do just as you like with it!"

"No, no," he said kindly; "we won't take the little woman's hoard away from her. Perhaps she'll find it useful some day, when she wants to run away from her husband."

"I *know* I am a great expense to you," said Mignon, not heeding his latter words, her mind anxiously bent upon her own shortcomings. "And I have a very large appetite, and I bought a pair of new boots yesterday! But I won't buy any more," she added, shaking her head with immense decision; "at least not out of *your* money, I'll use some of my own!"

"But I thought you were going to give it to me, Mignon?" said Adam gravely.

"So I was!" she said, looking rather chapfallen. "So I will! Only you see, now that I know you are not very rich, I shall hate to come and ask you for so much as a penny!"

"You must try and get over that!" said Adam. "It would be such a thousand pities to touch a tremendous sum like that, Mignon! No, no, as soon as we come to the last bit of bread in the pan, and meat in the larder, we will begin to draw out your hoard —a pound at a time!"

"But are we as poor as all that?" said Mignon in awe-struck tones.

"We are not rich," he said lightly, "and to beg I am ashamed—and to earn money at the bar is not easy, Mignon——"

"You are a barrister," she exclaimed, "and some day you will wear a wig and a silk gown?"

"If I live long enough," he said, laughing, "though I am afraid that the wig and gown

will be the most important part of the concern, for until a man is forty, his briefs are usually conspicuous by their absence!"

"But I thought—" she said, "I have heard Miss Sorel say, that barristers usually live in chambers—in the Temple?"

"So they do," he said; "and I have a little den of my own there. When I was eating my dinners I lived there altogether, but now that I have married a wife," he added, leaning forward and patting her cheek with his forefinger, "why, Mignon, I thought I would study at home, so had some books sent down—*voilà tout.*"

"But why did you do that?" she said. "It was a great deal of trouble, and you might have gone up as often, and stopped as long as you liked."

"In short," he said, with a very unusual touch of bitterness in his voice, "I might as well have gone—and stopped altogether, Mignon, for any difference that it would have made to you!"

"There you are *mistaken!*" said Mignon quickly, "for I should miss you very much indeed. Ask Prue if I did not stand at the gate a whole hour yesterday, watching for you, and only came in because a rude young man would walk up and down, and kiss his hand to me!"

"And yet, Mignon," he said, "and yet—" but he proceeded no farther in his speech.

The sweetness that is not love, the gentleness that is not affection, the sense of pleasure in a person's society that yet is not sympathy, are they not harder to fight against than positive indifference, suspicion, and dislike?

It is in the capacity we possess to move people that we are able to estimate the extent of our power over them, and of such power over Mignon, Adam knew that he possessed not so much as the shadow.

And about her, too, was that somewhat rare quality in a nineteenth-century maiden, a "gentle hard-heartedness" that some writer has ascribed to Miss Austen's heroines, and

that is more difficult to overcome than the aversion of an obstinate, self-willed virago.

The girl had risen, and was looking down on a book before her that had opened at the title-page.

"You have a second name?" she exclaimed, putting her finger down on the book, "and such a pretty one too! Why do not Flora and your father call you by it?"

"My mother always did," he said; and how different was the tone in which he said "my mother" to the one in which he habitually said "my father!"

"You loved her?" said Mignon, gently.

"Aye!" he said, leaning his head on his hand, "home was home to me while *she* lived."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards," he said, with a short impatient sigh, "it was—different. My father and I had but little in common, Flora and I still less; they were as uncongenial to me as I to them—they went their way, I went mine,

and yet we managed to clash pretty well sometimes."

"Did Flora marry Colin *for love?*" said Mignon irrelevantly, her eyes wandering to the open window, through the curtains of which showed a patch of blue sky, set about by a frame of scorched Virginia creeper.

"Why do you ask?" he said.

"But did she?" persisted Mignon.

"Do wives always love their husbands?" he said, and looked hard at her. Then he burst out laughing. "What a couple of Quakers we are, to be sure, with our cross-questions! If you want to know, Mignon, you must ask Flora herself—she won't hesitate to tell you the truth, and as to hurting her feelings on any point except her complexion, it's utterly impossible."

"It is very odd," said Mignon, "but though he seems so fond of her, they never go out together by any chance. He never proposes, nor does she seem to expect it."

"Colin is a wise man," said Adam, "and

perhaps when you have been out once or twice with Madam Flora, you will the better understand why he permits her to take her airings alone."

"But what does she *do?*" said Mignon, thoroughly puzzled.

"What does she *not* do?" he said with much disgust. "Well, Mignon, she has asked you again and again to drive to town with her, and by my desire you have each time refused, but the next time she asks you to do so—go! And if you ever want to go with her a second time, then I am very much mistaken."

"One sees a great many people when one goes to town?" she said.

"A great many."

"One stands a good chance of meeting the people one wishes to see?"

"No, not a very good one; it is a big place, Mignon."

She was standing directly before him; she had put her hands behind her back, and was regarding him very thoughtfully.

Some emotion was working in her mind, and had brought a faint colour to her cheek; a question trembled in her eyes and seemed to seek the answer in his; unconsciously he put out his hand and drew her down to his knee.

"Do you think that I should be likely to run up against *him* there?" she said.

He started up, setting her on the ground, his face changed from the warmth of flesh and blood, to rigidity of steel as he said, "Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of Mr. Rideout," she said, looking surprised and rather out of breath; "of whom else should I speak?"

"There are other men in the world," said Adam; "why cannot you call him by his name?"

"Because," she said with conviction, "somehow he always has been—always will be—*him* to me! You see he was the first person who ever fell in love with me, he wrote me my first love letter—and altogether I really

think that if I live to be a hundred, he will always be—*him !*"

Had the air suddenly grown stifling, or was the mere touch of Mignon's gown too irritating to be borne, that Adam turned abruptly, and going to the open casement, leaned far out into the garden air ?

"I am nearly positive," she went on, "that he told me that he was *living* near here, that he was constantly in and out of Lilytown—and if so he is sure to come back sooner or later, and we are bound to meet him, are we not, somewhere or other ?"

No reply.

"Though I should think it was most likely that if he were passing this way, he would come in and see us ?"

Adam left the window, turned and faced her.

"And does your happiness depend on your meeting this man again ?" he said sternly ; "do you look forward to such a meeting with feelings of interest and pleasure ?"

"I look forward to seeing him so much," she said vehemently, "that if I thought I was going to see him this very minute I should *jump* for joy. There is no one on earth (save her) that I so *long* to see as I do to see him!"

"And you say this to me," he said in an intensely low, clear voice—"to me. . . ."

"And to whom then should I say it but to you?" said the girl gently.

"Tell it to the winds—to Flora—whom you will—but bring me no more of your confidences; I will have none of them. Do you hear me, Mignon? I will have none of them!"

His clenched fist came down with a crash on the table by which he stood.

She looked at him with a sudden fear and wonder in her blue eyes.

"And if I may not come to you with my hopes, and thoughts, and fears," she said with a certain sweet and simple dignity, "then there is no one else to whom it is meet that I

should go, for it is not to Flora, no, indeed, that I should speak of such matters. And I will not trouble you again, nor vex you with my troubles and desires, you, who have been so good and kind to me always. . . ."

Her voice ceased in a little sob, then she turned and went quietly away, and all the sunlight and sweetness of the summer day seemed to merge themselves in her garments and go out with her through the open door, leaving the man who stood in the midst of his room looking very cold, and pale and weary, as one who in the battle of life flags suddenly, and weary of the rout, feels that he has no longer heart or vigour to continue the war with any hope of success.

CHAPTER IX.

"If you cannot inspire a woman with love of you, fill her above the brim with love of herself; all that runs over will be yours."

"I BEG your pardon," said Flora, "but I have knocked three times; and—have you and Adam been *quarrelling?*" she added abruptly as, advancing, she caught sight of Mignon sitting like Niobe in grief, with tears splashing heavily down upon her clasped hands.

"No," said Mignon, dashing her tears away and sitting erect, "we have not been quarrelling." Her right hand instinctively tightened on that oft-perused, closely-guarded letter of Miss Sorel's that now told a flattering tale of

love and hope, and now one of utter despair and desolation.

"It is rather early days to begin," said Flora; "so far as I can remember Colin and I were perfect turtle-doves for the first month we were married—though to be sure," she added meditatively, as she sank into an easy-chair, "we have fought without intermission ever since! It is always a great mistake to cry," she went on with conviction; "to get into a rage is not half so disfiguring to one's appearance, and answers the purpose just as well!"

"But," cried Mignon, "we have *not* been quarrelling—I have not even seen Adam since breakfast, and——"

"Then have you been indulging in sentimental poetry, or are you a prey to melancholy?" said Flora. "If the latter, I can tell you of an excellent cure I saw in a book for it the other day: '*It is no small remedy to cure melancholy, to rub your body all over with nettles.*' I can't say I have ever tried it,

but I make you a present of the suggestion!"

Flora had risen and was surveying herself from head to foot in a swing-glass with sincere admiration, and indeed it must be confessed that Flora in out-of-door attire was every whit as fine a woman as Flora in a white morning cap and gown; the only pity was that she struck one as being almost *too* fine, one felt a sensation as of catching one's breath in the effort to get her all into one's eye at once.

Some persons have a distinct personality of their own, one picks them out instinctively from the ruck of breathing automata by which one finds oneself surrounded in all places; we are conscious of the presence of the others, but we do not look at or observe them, whereas to those who distinctly impress themselves upon us as *persons*, we give our full and critical attention.

Now Flora's personality was very great—Mignon could have found it in her heart to

wish there were less of it, as she sat looking at her sister-in-law, and wondering how it was that though other women wore oddly-shaped head-gear, and curiously blended colours, they never contrived to look half as remarkable as she did.

"I am not quite sure," said Flora, taking up a hand-glass, and surveying herself with grave deliberation, "whether this shade of tea-rose is not rather too deep for my complexion. Of course it's all very well for those whitey-brown women who can't supply any colour themselves, but when one has a skin like a peach, why one is obliged to be careful!"

Flora had long ago come to regard Mignon as a little, harmless, pretty schoolgirl, without an idea in her head, or even the sense to observe when she (Flora) made a fool of herself.

"It is very odd," said that young matron, as she slowly revolved before the presentment of her charms, "but wear what I will, people stare at me when I go out as if they

had never seen a woman in all their lives before! It used to make Colin furious, he actually had the impertinence to declare that it was *my fault;* but now he goes his way, and I mine, and if we were to take a drive together, I am sure we should both feel as if the world were coming to an end!"

"And where is he this afternoon?" said Mignon, rousing herself with a great effort.

"Gone to town with Taffy and Colin the Younger," said Flora. "But come!" she added, walking briskly to the window, and lifting the blind, "put on your hat and cloak, for if we dawdle about in this fashion we shall never get out to-day."

"But I am not going out," said Mignon, who had by this time put away her letter and dried her eyes.

"But indeed you are!" said Flora. "Why I do believe," she added suddenly, "that Simon Pure is going to town himself, for he has got on a respectable hat, and his nether garments dimly suggest a wedding! So

you *have* been quarrelling," she said, turning sharply round on Mignon, "and he is striding away,

"'All in his Sunday best,'

to sue for a divorce or catch the tidal-boat from Folkestone! My dear, I know his little ways, and there is—there certainly is—(or can it be merely the unusual elegance of his coat?) an unutterable *something* about his back that speaks volumes!"

A rustling of petticoats, a scramble of feet, the blind lifted a few inches higher, and Mignon, with an odd and unaccountable sinking at her heart, was also regarding the unusual spectacle of Adam in perfectly orthodox attire, disappearing in the distance.

"I wonder where he is going?" she said, dropping the blind and looking at Flora anxiously; "he scarcely ever goes out in the afternoon——"

"So he did not tell you he was going out," said Flora calmly, "I thought as much.

Well—take my advice, my dear, don't stand any nonsense with him—bring him down on his marrow-bones, and, for you're quite pretty enough, keep him there! When I married," she continued, returning to the contemplation of her charms, "I made up my mind *never* to yield a point, whether I was right or wrong, particularly if I were wrong, and I never did! It is only a question of pull devil, pull baker, and whichever pulls hardest and longest, wins!"

"Poor Colin!" thought Mignon with a sigh.

"Here is your hat," said Flora, who had fallen to rummaging among various band-boxes. "My dear, why do *all* your garments look as if they came out of Arcadia? How on earth you contrive to look such a piece of innocence I can't imagine; I'm sure *I* did not at your age!"

Mignon, glancing across at her sister-in-law, could not find it easy to suppose that at any time her looks could have erred on the side of innocence.

"Shall I go?" said the girl doubtfully, half to herself, half to Flora.

Five minutes ago the visit to town had been instantly negatived. Now she hesitated; what had happened in the interval to work the change in her mind?

"Of course you will!" said Flora; "as that husband of yours has gone out himself he can't possibly object to your going, or want you for this, that, or the other, as he generally does!"

No, indeed, it was rarely enough that Adam ever wanted her for anything now, thought Mignon, as she took up her gloves and followed Flora downstairs.

Without, Mr. Montrose's men-servants were simmering in the sun with patient disgust, while Mr. Montrose's horses were champing their bits and pawing the gravel in a fury of impatience to be gone.

Whatever might be the quality of the old gentleman's wits, his taste in horseflesh was unimpeachable, and no tightly bearing-reined

showy screw ever disgraced the respectability of *his* family chariot.

"After all," said Flora, as they rolled away, "it was very foolish of me to come out this broiling afternoon," she moved her pale pink parasol a few inches and glanced up at the blazing sun overhead, "and very kind of you, I am sure, to accompany me!"

Mignon did not reply; she was wondering whether Adam had made up his mind to go out before or *after* Flora had appeared.

Her speculations were, however, cut short by the discovery that to go out with Mrs. Dundas was to assist at a raree show, to which all comers were welcome, and no one paid a penny for the treat.

For every head to turn as on a pivot as she passed, for the stolid faces of passers-by to rapidly change from indifference to an open-eyed and wondering regard, nay, for the very carters on their perches to remove their pipes the better to favour Flora with a broad and familiar stare, surely there must be something

hopelessly *wrong* somewhere, or did all women of quality and fashion conduct themselves thus when they went abroad?

"It really is very singular," said Flora, with much complacency; "but the way people *will* stare at me is perfectly ridiculous! Now do you know" (she paused to pursue with her eyes and wrest from a man who was passing, a glance of bold admiration), "that although you are very pretty in your way, yet for one person who looks at you there are twenty who look at me?"

"I dare say!" said Mignon, smiling in spite of her heavy heart.

"It was always the same," said Flora, pensively. "Colin declares that it is because I stare about, but other women stare about enough, goodness knows, and nobody looks at *them*."

And she spread out her plump hand with a slightly theatrical gesture, that made Mignon, scarcely knowing why, shrink farther back into her corner.

At that moment a man in a mail phaeton, who had been passing and re-passing the carriage for some minutes, apparently deeming the free and easy gesture a sign of encouragement, turned slowly round and looked at Flora with the covert smile, that from a stranger is so deliberate an insult (if she did but know it) to the woman who has provoked it.

"People are so ill-natured in this world," said Flora, a momentary flicker in her eyes betraying that she had accepted, not repelled the impertinence; "would you believe there are actually people who call me—fast? And if there is one thing on earth more than another that I have a horror of," she added piously, "it is a frisky matron!"

It is a peculiarity worth observing in human nature, that having taken mental photographs of ourselves, the result should always be the exact reverse of what we appear to our friends.

"Did you see that?" suddenly exclaimed

Flora, laughing heartily. "A man on a cart was so engaged in staring at me, that he actually *fell off* his seat!"

"Did he?" said Mignon, her pale cheeks growing scarlet, glancing apprehensively at the grey backs of the coachman and footman before her. Verily we should pay good wages to our servants, who, however flagrantly we may sin or misconduct ourselves, dare not treat us with anything but absolute respect! When *they* trip and fall, their shrift is apt to be short indeed.

As they neared town, the fun grew fast and furious. Flora's form seemed to grow larger and more striking, she sat erect, her eyes darting hither and thither, missing not one glance of admiration, from the whip who tooled his four-in-hand by, to the hurdy-gurdy man with a monkey, who dared to lift his eyes to hers with as bold an appreciation of her beauty as the other. A fine, free woman is fine and free for prince and peasant alike, and the latter is in no way impressed by the

sober respectability of her servants or the irreproachable character of her equipage; she may be a duchess for all he knows or cares, her levity brings her down to his own level.

"The park," said Flora, as the footman turned and touched his hat for orders.

"Not that there will be a soul there," she added to Mignon; "how can you expect people to remain in town the last week in July, when they have a chance of getting out of it? If there is one thing on earth I made a mistake in," she went on with conviction, "it was in marrying—Colin! Boxed up in the Highlands for three parts of the year, with a visit to his frumpish old mother in Piccadilly, in June, a month with papa in July and August, these, including a visit to Ireland in the winter, are all the amusements I get; and really, except the winter trip, there's not an ounce of fun to be got out of the whole twelve months! It all comes," she continued impressively, "of marrying a man who has not come into the title and estates,

and who has an old father who literally seems to intend to live for ever; and until Sir Peter dies, we have nothing, absolutely *nothing,* to make life bearable !"

They were by now in the park, and though, according to the shibboleth talked by the fools of fashion, there might not be a soul present, still there were a good many bodies riding, driving, and walking about, who did not seem to find the lack of the spiritual essence before alluded to, to trouble them in the least.

It was all new to Mignon, and from beneath her white sun-shade she looked about her with eager, curious interest.

There were men in the company of their wives looking bored and extinguished, men acting the part of *cavalieri serventi,* looking alert and happy; the right Jill with the wrong Jack, the right Jack with the wrong Jill; here and there a pair of lovers properly matched, the man having that contented air which is his nearest approach to happiness in

public, the girl pervaded with that ineffable air of *bien être* that nothing short of the right man in the right place ever produces; women who were pretty by nature, and ridiculous by fashion; women who spent half their lives in trying to persuade the world that they were beautiful, and who had all the tastes of pretty women, with none of the means of gratifying them; and who could not be made to understand that beauty does not consist in a careful arrangement of the hair or deft application of paint, but is something grand, simple, harmonious, that lies in the curve of a lip, the glance of an eye, the moulding of a cheek, and is no acquired gift, but a birthright from Heaven.

But if Mignon was amused, so was not Flora. The carriage had been drawn up under the trees, and as the minutes went by and the stream of carriages on the one side, of people on the other, flowed slowly past, she grew more and more impatient, her fine colour grew finer still, her roving glance

flitted incessantly from one to the other of the passing faces. Now and again a hat was raised to her, but the owner of the same, after a more or less admiring glance at her blooming countenance, invariably passed on.

Flora Dundas might be a very lovely and charming woman to flirt with at home, or on the quiet, but in public — no, thank you! She had an awkward knack of attracting general attention to herself, of conducting her flirtations in the broadest light of day, so that all who ran might read, and men as a rule prefer a little secrecy about the matter, and are far oftener found faithful to the plain married woman, whose behaviour is irreproachable abroad, than to the imprudent beauty who has thrown the challenge down to society, with a foolhardy defiance that, by some curious process of reasoning, she justifies by the name of courage.

In vain Flora bowed with charming *empressement*, in vain she threw archest invita-

tion into her eyes, the carriage in which she sat remained unbesieged, while those of infinitely less attractive women were surrounded. Her gay smiles began to fade, the corners of her lips to fall, she was indeed intensely conscious of looking that shorn and incomplete splendour, a handsome woman, from whom the indispensable adjunct, man, was missing.

Nevertheless there was balm to be found in Gilead, when, by-and-by, a languid voice murmured, "How d'ye do, Mrs. Dundas?" into the back of Flora's pink bonnet, and turning with instantly-recovered good-humour, she found herself face to face with one of those frock-coated, tight-booted, eye-glassed gentlemen whose object in life appears to be to prove how contemptible and worthless a creature man can be when he has nothing to occupy either his mind or his hands.

"How do you do?" said Flora with great animation, "and where on earth do you

spring from? Why, I have not seen you since—since——"

"Lady Waterdale's garden-party," he said, taking her hand and gently squeezing it, while his languid glance dwelt on her face as though, on the whole, he rather admired, and liked looking at it. Rather, not much, for this person's manner gave one the impression that it would be absolute death to him to be in earnest about anything.

"Mr. Colquhon—my sister, Mrs. Montrose," said Flora, turning to Mignon, and with faint reluctance Mr. Colquhon withdrew his gaze from the one occupant of the carriage to the other.

There is that in every woman's eyes which will instantly determine a man's glance either in the direction of respect or freedom. It is no more than the work of a moment, yet the woman's place in the man's estimation is then fixed for ever.

Thus Mr. Colquhon, as he raised his hat to Mignon, became all at once aware that he

was in the presence of some one altogether different from, and by no means to be confounded with, Flora.

"Is your husband here?" he said to the latter, his tone changing, his familiar, lounging attitude insensibly becoming more respectful.

Flora stared at him for a moment in silence. Was the man mad? Could any past or present admirer commit a more glaring solecism than to make inquiries after the lawful lord and master of one who herself totally ignored him?

"I believe he is very well," she said with a slight shrug of the shoulders, and then was piqued to discover that Mr. Colquhon was not listening for her reply, or indeed looking at her at all, but at Mignon.

He leaned over Mrs. Dundas. "*Miss* Montrose surely?" he said in a very low voice, "not *Mrs.?*"

"She is my brother's wife," said Flora coldly.

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Dundas? How d'ye do, Colquhon?"

And another dandy, even more fearfully and wonderfully made by his tailor than the man he addressed, paused to smirk, and bow, and murmur his little nothings by the side of Flora's landau.

Flora was now in her element, coquetting, smiling, ogling, making herself, in short, as detestable as a woman in whom vanity has obliterated all traces of good breeding, possibly can.

In all this mirth Mignon took no part. Almost hidden beneath her white umbrella, she watched the passers-by, and dreamed her dreams undisturbed, and the two men, finding it impossible to win one look from those misty, exquisite blue eyes, devoted themselves to Flora and her follies, laughing loud and long at her sallies with the laughter that is not with the person who provokes it, but against him.

It was deplorable to see this woman, en-

dowed with more than average intelligence, shrewd, well-read, and with an excellent notion of her world and its manners, become, so soon as her inordinate vanity and greed of admiration were called into play, a butt for the derision of all who beheld her.

"There is Colin!" exclaimed Mignon suddenly, feeling the sight of Colin's ugly honest countenance to be a refreshing one, and wishing with all her heart that she could pluck up enough spirit to jump out of the carriage and ask him to take care of her, with Taffy and his brother.

"Is that you, Colin?" said Flora in her loud, clear voice, a voice that set the passers-by turning round to see from whom it proceeded. "Come here, I want you."

At hearing himself addressed by his wife he started, winced visibly, then raised his hat, nodded, and passed on.

He had no taste for the *rôle* of *mari complaisant*, and his wife's conduct in public had

an unfortunate knack of making him appear to fill the character whether he would or no.

"Upon my word!" said Flora, reddening, and biting her lips as she caught a covert smile upon the faces of the two men beside her.

"How is Mrs. Crawley's husband?" Lord Steyne sometimes used to inquire of the immortal Becky.

It spoke something for Colin's manliness of character, that in spite of all that notorious flirt Flora Dundas might do, he was *not* known in society as Mrs. Dundas's husband.

"It is quite a family gathering, I am sure," said Flora, sarcastically. "Is not that" (turning to Mignon) "your amiable spouse, yonder?"

Mignon looked up quickly; yes, sure enough, at a little distance, and apparently watching her intently, was Adam. He too, when he found himself observed, waved his hand and disappeared in the crowd, his great

stature marking him out to her eyes for some distance.

There came into her face so lovely a rush of colour, into her eyes so proud yet wistful a regard, that Mr. Colquhon, after duly noting these signs, turned and looked about him for their cause, with true masculine presumption concluding that they must be caused by one of his own sex.

"Is it possible?" suddenly exclaimed Flora in tones of intense excitement, her brilliant colour paling a little, her breath coming and going quickly, "*yes*—no—*yes*—it really *is*," and regardless of the sun's scorching rays, she leaned eagerly forward to look at some one who was advancing slowly along the gravel walk.

Both men turned to stare; Mignon, catching something of Flora's excitement, also bent forward and beheld—Philip La Mert.

Haggard, ill-dressed, worn, strangely out of place in this arena of frivolity and fashion, brought hither by no thought of distraction

or amusement, but seeking here, as in other places, for that which he feared to find, loathing the search that in all its hideous length and breadth he was compelled to prosecute, a shadow indeed of the handsome, devil-may-care fellow who had shaken Prue into bringing Mignon her first love-letter not two months ago.

"He does not see me," cried Flora breathlessly, too taken up with herself to see how the girl by her side was gazing at him with flushed cheeks, and her soul in her eyes, only prevented from uttering his name aloud by a sudden shyness, and almost fear that his looks induced in her.

But he saw neither her nor Flora, his gaze was bent beyond them both, bent on a person who seemed to have for him as great a fascination as he had for them.

Involuntarily Flora and Mignon turned to see what it was that he regarded, the two men turned also, and as they looked, made up their mouths into that whistle which is a man's

invariable method of showing surprise or concern, and to which the fair sex has no equivalent.

A block in the carriages had occurred, and drawn up so close to Mr. Montrose's that Flora might have put out her hand to touch its sole occupant, was a Victoria, in which was seated a woman whose face, manner, and costume were as irreproachably faultless as her equipage and horses.

Cold, chaste, pure-looking as the snowdrops that rested on her pale hair, she was the very impersonation of chilly innocence, of passionless perfection, and a greater contrast to the man whose eyes at that moment met her own could not well be conceived. It was as it should be—he was the sinner, she the sinned against; and as she looked, there dawned slowly on her lips a faint and haughty smile of triumph.

It was the work of a moment, then the carriage moved on, Philip La Mert had passed on his way, and,

"Who was that woman?" cried Mignon breathlessly, something in that fair, cold face, that transient yet cruel regard, impressing her so strangely, that she did not even note the disappearance of the man whom she had so ardently longed to see again.

"That," said Flora, drawing a deep breath, "*was*—Mrs. La Mert, *now* is—Miss Dorillon!"

"And will be Mrs. Des Vœux before three months are out," said Mr. Colquhon, shrugging his shoulders, adding *sotto voce* and with more real disgust than one would have believed him capable of entertaining, "Demmed bad taste on her part to show so soon after the *esclandre*. I really couldn't have believed it of a woman whose taste in dress and everything was always so good, while as to La Mert—*Que diable allait il faire dans cette galère?*"

CHAPTER X.

"Good name in man and woman . . . .
Is the immediate jewel of their souls."

THE sensation of the afternoon was over.

The slight confused murmur that had passed from carriage to carriage, and from lip to lip of the circulating crowd at the spectacle of the meeting between the lately divorced husband and wife, had ceased, and as the lady passed on her way, the gentleman on his, a quick fire of exclamation, question and answer, ensued on all sides, to which Mignon listened with chill hands and throbbing heart, longing, with an intensity that

was almost a spoken prayer, to see him returning, to behold in his eyes the recognition for her that they had but a moment ago accorded to the handsome, cold-faced woman, whom she instinctively, and without either rhyme or reason, hated.

Other people, too, were on the look-out for Philip's return. Always a man of note, one upon whom men of fashion in vain strove to model themselves, and at whose glance the proudest woman melted, he had by recent events become more notorious still, and his sudden re-appearance in a well-known haunt simultaneously with the first "show" in public of Miss Dorillon, afforded endless ground of discussion, sending an electric shock of excitement through the languid veins of the personages, who, in the capacity of on-lookers, had assisted at the comedy from the first act to the last.

For to the majority of them it was a comedy, no more, the heroine of the piece deserving special commendation for the address with

which she had played her cards, and the signal skill with which she had turned the tables on one by whom her own sex had been so often and flagrantly wronged. It might have been expected that for this reason she would obtain the countenance and gratitude of her own sex, but such was by no means the case.

For women, and curiously enough, often the noblest and the best, are irresistibly attracted by men whose success as heart-breakers has passed into a proverb, and far from comprehending all that the name implies, they are apt to think that some special virtues and excellencies must adorn a man who is so universally yielded to and adored. Well, occasionally they are right; there was reason in the victories of Julius Cæsar and Sir Philip Sidney, two great men, to whom women were no less dangerous than they themselves were to women, and in this perhaps lay the great secret of the charm they exercised over the fair sex, that the attraction was mutual; but, on the other hand, we are filled with marvel

as we read of the brilliant successes of such men as the gross and repulsive Pietro Aretino; the hideously deformed and ribald Scarron; of the reckless dare-devil soldier Trenck, who, in spite of ugliness of the most positive kind, was as splendidly successful in every assault of love as of arms; of the infamous John Wilkes, at once the most frightful and dissolute man in England; or of Marshal de Richelieu, over whom that famous duel between Mesdames de Polignac and de Nesle was fought in the Bois de Boulogne, and for whom those lovely young Princesses de Charolais and de Valois pulled caps, and intrigued and sacrificed themselves, to be rewarded (as was his way of rewarding all the women who so fondly and truly loved him) when the time for serving him had gone by, with absolute indifference and neglect.

Philip La Mert was neither a Julius Cæsar nor a Scarron; his vices and virtues were originally pretty evenly balanced, but as each ran into excess, his moral nature had become

something of a quagmire from whence all distinguishing landmarks had apparently vanished.

Flora, in the midst of ejaculations, surmises, and many cranings of her neck in search of the returning form of Philip, was interrupted by Mignon, who, leaning forward, said in tones of intense anxiety: "Do you think that Mr. Rideout will come back?"

"Mr. Rideout!" repeated Flora, "why, who on earth do you mean, child? I don't know any Mr. Rideout——"

"But that was he," said Mignon, rather impatiently; "he passed just now, and you told me that lady was his--his wife, and——"

"That was Mr. La Mert," said Flora; "but how on earth do you come to know anything about *him?*" she added quickly; then, in the same breath, "Oh! Adam has told you about him of course! No, my dear, I do *not* think he is coming back; I am afraid there is no such luck. If it had not been for that horrid woman passing just when she did,

he could not have helped seeing me, and I should have been able to introduce you to the most charming man in town!"

Introduce her! Mignon grew first red, then pale, as Flora spoke, but as the latter turned to Mr. Colquhon, the moment for acknowledging her previous acquaintance with Philip passed by, and somehow there never afterwards seemed to come to her an opportunity of saying: "He was my lover once, and asked me to marry him."

The moment was lost, never to be regained, although the tacit deceit, if such it might be called, would be better described as part of that intense shrinking from the betrayal to Flora of any portion of her inner life, that had prevented her ever uttering the name of Muriel to her sister-in-law, much less canvassing the hopes and fears that made her life one April day of alternate storm and sunshine.

It is often but a trifle that determines a man's destiny, it is often but a slight

puerile cause that separates two friends and lovers,

> "It is the little rift within the lute
> That by-and-by will make the music mute,
> And ever widening, slowly silence all;"

and in the days that came after, it seemed to more than one, that if Mignon, hardening herself against all fanciful, foolish scruples, had told her sister's story and her own to Flora, the end would not have been what it was . . . . She did not again seek to engage Flora's attention. She sat quite still, a deadly feeling of disappointment that was almost despair settling slowly round her heart. At sight of Philip, a sudden joy, a breathless gladness, a sensation as of one who comes face to face with a thing longed for yet totally unexpected, had possessed her with a vehemence that left her no power of speech, else had she called upon him by name, heedless of all save that once more she found herself in his presence. Then, some fascination drawing her eyes to the woman whose gaze he was

returning, her attention had become fixed, and when she turned with a start in search of him, he had disappeared.

In vain Philip La Mert's numerous acquaintances lounged, and watched, and waited; he did not return. Neither was Miss Dorillon again visible, thereby severely disappointing those many dear friends who had barely caught a glimpse of her in passing, and who were naturally anxious to see how she looked under her present peculiar circumstances. It is the instinct of a man, when a woman is suffering acute shame or pain of mind, to avert his eyes from her; it is disagreeable, even painful to him to witness it, no matter how thoroughly she may have brought her punishment upon herself: the impulse of a sister woman is in a totally opposite direction. A vivisectionist is cruel in the interests of science; the pangs which he inflicts will be the means of saving countless precious human lives in the future, and he uses his scalpel, not out of wantonness, or

because his work is agreeable to him, but because it is necessary. Well, we make a great fuss over the poor dumb creatures, but who ever heard of a great agitation meeting over the cruelties inflicted upon women by women? An amount of pluck is required by the unæsthetised human victim under torture, that is most assuredly not required by the brute.

"You are not going home?" exclaimed Mignon, rousing herself as Flora, after taking an effusive farewell of her popinjays, and many parting wavings of her pink hand, had given the order "home."

"But indeed I am," said Flora, settling herself luxuriously into her corner; "have you forgotten that there is such a thing as dinner in the world? Still, I would willingly wait half-an-hour longer, dinner notwithstanding, if I thought there was the ghost of a chance of seeing Philip La Mert again!"

"You know him?" said Mignon timidly.

"*I* know him, my dear? Of course I do —who doesn't? He always was a well-known man, but *now*——"

"But what has he done?" said Mignon eagerly.

"If you ask me what he *has done*," said Flora profoundly, "I am bound to tell you that one volume, ten, twenty, would not contain the record of his deeds, good, bad, and indifferent; but if you ask me what he has *not* done, why, I could answer you far more easily!"

"Is it a bad thing," said Mignon, "to be divorced from a wife?"

"It is a very excellent thing indeed," said Flora, "when the wife happens to be a Miss Dorillon; but as a rule, my dear, Mrs. Grundy does not approve of her maidens efflorescing from Misses into Madams, and from Madams back again into Misses, and so she is apt to look unkindly on the men who are instrumental in these violent changes of designation."

"But was Miss Dorillon—wicked?" said Mignon below her breath.

"In the eyes of the world," said Flora, "she is as white as the snowdrops she wears to-day on her bonnet, while Philip La Mert is the *âme damnée* to whom it has been her unfortunate fate to be linked, but the few who are behind the scenes, who are acquainted with the story from beginning to end, think—differently."

"And what is the story?" said Mignon eagerly; "he loved her, I suppose, and she did not love him, was that it?"

For lately, Mignon has been reading more than one love story; moreover she has been thinking, and has somehow arrived at a far better notion of love and love's requirements, than she ever had before.

"If a man's love for a woman may be gauged by the pains he is at to win her," said Flora, "then Philip loved the fair Una very much indeed; if you measure it by his behaviour to her after he has obtained her,

I should say that he disliked her extremely!"

"But why did he marry her then?" said Mignon impetuously, "or perhaps," she added in a lower key, "it was *out of kindness?*"

"Dear me, no!" said Flora, "he was by no means a man to sacrifice himself upon the altar of duty! Have you never heard the Frenchman's witty definition of *une passion?* —*Une grande caprice enflammée par des obstacles,* and that was precisely Mr. La Mert's feeling for her, my dear; half the so-called unselfish, one-sided love in the world is pure obstinacy. It makes me laugh when I hear people admiring the dogged perseverance of a man who persists in his suit to a woman who can't bear him; the good souls think that as there is no return, his must be pure disinterested love, but not a bit of it! Oftener than not he is angry and piqued (and pique will drive a man into anything), and because he is determined that neither she nor the

world shall have the laugh against him, and if at length his fervour melts her coldness, ten to one but as she thaws, he will freeze, revenging himself richly upon her for her previous insolence and disdain. A man may, and often does, forgive you for breaking his heart, but for the wound you have inflicted on his vanity? Never!"

"Then she did not love him?" said Mignon.

"*No*," said Flora, reflectively, "she most certainly did not."

"It is a long tale," she added, after a short pause devoted to the silencing of one or two scruples of conscience as to the desirability of acquainting this child with the details of so unedifying a story as was that of Mr. La Mert's life. Adam would be furious if he knew it, but what did his fury matter to her? And after all, was not this girl a married woman, and must she not sooner or later become acquainted with the backsliding ways of this wicked world?

"A *very* long story!" repeated Flora, "though for the matter of that, it is one that does not take very long to tell. The saddest stories are usually summed up in the fewest words!"

"It *is* a sad one then?" exclaimed Mignon involuntarily.

"Can you look him in the face and doubt it?" said Flora. "My dear, he is one of those mortals upon whom the fairies at birth bestow every good gift a man can desire, but the queen of the fairies who comes last, angry perhaps at the lavish generosity of the others, makes him—unlucky! With advantages in his favour that make other men ready to die of envy, luck has always gone dead against him, and I feel convinced, always *will* to his dying day!

"They used to say," she went on, "that he scarcely ever stirred without something untoward happening to him. If he rode a race the horse was sure to come to grief; if he backed one, it was bound to lose; he lost a

fortune at cards, and never appeared upon the box seat of the coach of his regiment, without causing the other men present to tremble for their lives. However, if he was unlucky in all else, he was brilliantly successful in one thing—Love."

"And yet you say his wife did not care for him?" said Mignon quickly.

"No, she did not. There the inevitable evil genius of his destiny stepped in. I should have said that he was brilliantly successful with women up to a certain point—beyond it his bad luck asserted itself, and he was as unlucky in his relations with women as with everything else.

"Have you ever read the life of Burns?" she went on, her colour coming and going, "and do you remember the Duchess of Gordon saying that nobody had ever so completely carried her off her feet as Robert Burns did? Well, no one ever so completely carried me off my feet as Philip La Mert did! Not that he was ever an admirer of mine," she sighed

impatiently, "but I used to meet him winter after winter in Dublin, and——"

"*In Dublin!*" repeated Mignon, sitting bolt upright, and regarding Flora with breathless eagerness—"in *Dublin* did you say?"

"To be sure—why not?" said Flora, somewhat impatiently, who hated to be interrupted in the midst of what she was saying.

"Did you know a Mrs. Faulkner?" said Mignon, leaning forward and laying her eager hand on Flora's plump arm.

"No," said Flora after a few moments of unwilling reflection, "I did not! One can't know *everybody* in Dublin, you know, and very likely she was some old frump, who did not go into society?"

"I don't know," said Mignon, trembling, "but perhaps her daughters, who were nearly grown up, did. You are sure that you never met *them* out—or their governess, a Miss Brook?"

"Never!" said Flora with calm decision; "I feel quite sure that I have never met the

Misses Faulkner *or* their governess! Governesses and lady-helps are not as a rule met with in general society, I think!

"However, to continue, it must be—let me see—quite four years since I first met Philip La Mert in Dublin. He was then the maddest of all the mad fellows of the —th Dragoons then quartered in that city.

"For some reason or other, perhaps his extraordinary good looks, his wealth, wit, or fascination, he was the rage, and wherever he went he was caressed, besieged, spoiled, and flattered to an extent that would have turned any other man's head, but which seemed to make no impression upon him, for with all his faults, and they were pretty numerous, Mr. Philip was no coxcomb."

"And he was a favourite with women, you say?" said Mignon, sighing.

"He had the reputation," said Flora, looking absently out at the hedgerows all powdered and whitened with the same "strange snow" that made the carriage-wheels go noiselessly

as on velvet, "of never failing to win any woman who was beautiful enough to please his fastidious taste, and from what I myself have seen, I believe rumour in this instance to speak no more than the truth. He was the terror of every husband or father who owned a handsome wife or daughter, and I never shall forget the flutter there used to be in the dovecots when Mr. Philip would come swaggering into a ball or reception-room, very late, with half the beauties in the room sitting down because they would not fill up their cards till he had taken such dances as he pleased! All the lawful guardians and duennas gathering their chickens under their wings, and he just throwing his bold eyes hither and thither among them, and then it was ten to one if he did not walk up to the most closely guarded of them all, and carry her off from under her husband's very nose, for he made no secret of the fact that he infinitely preferred married women to girls! It was said," she went on, "that when he

got married every husband who owned a pretty wife, rang a peal of joy-bells on his own account; but if they did they were somewhat premature in their rejoicings, for Philip married, was even worse than Philip single."

"And his marriage?" said Mignon impatiently, "when and how did that happen? and——"

"My dear," said Flora calmly, "are you aware that it is extremely ill-bred to interrupt a person who is telling you a story? If you will have a little patience, I shall come to that in good time. It was in—let me see—the second winter, I think, of my acquaintance with Philip La Mert, two years and a half ago, that something—happened. He fell in love, or pretended to do so. Hitherto, it had been well known that for all his brilliant successes with women, he had never in his life had more than a passing fancy for one, and that, in spite of the looseness of his life and morals, there was no man living who had a keener appreciation of, or reverence

for, feminine virtue and purity than he. So that when in the winter I mention he was found paying his hottest court to Miss Dorillon, a cold, heavy *blonde*, who was by some people suspected of being by no means as modest as she looked, everybody marvelled, firstly at his bad taste, secondly at her indifference, for indifferent she undoubtedly was, in this respect differing totally from every other woman upon whom Mr. Philip had ever deigned to cast a favouring eye. Some people said, ill-naturedly enough, that it was her stupidity that attracted him, that his own vitality being so intense, he found in her torpidity a welcome rest—and, indeed, did not Clive Newcome himself lay down the axiom that some women ought to be stupid? 'What you call dulness, I call repose,' says he. 'Give me a calm woman, a slow woman, a lazy, majestic woman! . . . . A lively woman would be the death of me!' Well, there are many such men in the world as Mr. Clive, and upon my word when all is said and

done, I think those dull majestic creatures get the best of it!

"Women professed to wonder at what the men could see in Miss Dorillon, but undoubtedly she was handsome in her cold passionless way. Not beautiful; had she been so, the question would never have been raised, for, my dear, there is a royalty about real beauty that the world, spiteful as it is, never fails to recognise; it is like diamonds, or talent of any kind, and always commands its market, so when you hear people disputing hotly about So-and-So's good looks, make up your mind that she is handsome, odd, fascinating or lovable—but really beautiful?—not a bit of it.

"She certainly was the whitest creature I ever saw; you could pick her out of a crowd of bare-necked women by her snowy shoulders alone, but she had no conversation, never exerted herself to amuse anybody, and to old, young, handsome and ugly men alike, exhibited a profound indifference, that disgusted

some, piqued others, and of these latter was Philip La Mert.

"Always an admirer of *blonde* women, his roving eyes had rested upon her with more approbation than they usually expressed, but when he found that she treated him precisely the same as she did the youngest and pertest subaltern in his regiment, he was disagreeably astonished, he felt his pride to be touched, he was by no means used to be beaten in anything, least of all at a game at which he had hitherto so signally distinguished himself, and the icy resistance she made him, quickly transformed a mere passing admiration into an exciting chase that led him farther than he ever intended to go, when he began it—headstrong, reckless, unlucky fellow!

"Well, as I have said before, the spectacle of that confirmed flirt, Mr. La Mert, paying serious court to that solemn goddess, Miss Dorillon, filled all beholders with amazement. Some thought he was amusing himself as usual, others that he was now in earnest for

the first time in his life; the women were beside themselves with envy and jealousy, and seeing how well coldness seemed to succeed with him, were fain to try it themselves, but, my dear, that is the sort of thing that must be tried first—not last.

"As to Miss Dorillon, the most consummate coquette living could not have played her cards better than she (if her object was to win Philip La Mert); to all appearance she had thoroughly mastered the first and most important axiom of a practised flirt: 'First attract—then keep cool!' only, as it turned out afterwards, her frigidity was not acting at all, but good, honest, downright indifference. She was a mulish creature without a ray of imagination, or surely her heart must have been touched by a man who knew how to make love as charmingly as did Mr. Philip."

"But the story," said Mignon, heaving just such a little quick short sigh as children give when they are told the "crisis" of the

fairy tale is coming, "the story! I want to know how it all ended!"

"We shall come to that presently," said Flora, in a tone of rebuke. "Well, time went by, a month, six weeks, and the position of affairs between the two remained precisely the same as before. The lady had not abated her *froideur* in the smallest degree, the gentleman had not advanced an inch, yet showed no slightest intention of abandoning his attack of the fortress, and of course he got unmercifully chaffed by the men, and was more than ever spoiled by those sighing beauties who would gladly have consoled him for Miss Dorillon's insensibility by their own kindness had he so permitted them, but he did not. And one fine morning Dublin was electrified by the news that Mr. La Mert and Miss Dorillon were engaged, and would be married very shortly indeed.

"It was a nine days' wonder. I don't know which fact excited the most astonishment, that he should have proposed to her,

or that she should have accepted him; only the day before she had been as indifferent to him as ever—something had happened in the interim to make her change her mind—but what? no one could find out.

"They appeared everywhere in public together, there was now nothing to choose between their demeanour, for the one was as cool as the other, and many people hopefully enough foretold that the match would never come off—but it did.

"With pomp and show, and much pageantry and ringing of bells, those two were made one, and I am bound to say that a handsomer pair than Una and Philip La Mert never walked out of a church door together.

"They went away for two months, and when they re-appeared, it was plain that if they had departed with but little love between them, they returned with still less, while the hearts of certain of the women were gladdened by the discovery that Mr. Philip was quite as

ready a lover, and even more delightful an one, than he was before.

"Well, people blamed him of course, and looked upon him as a hopeless black sheep, all but a few, who knew that bad as he was, in this case he had some excuse for his conduct. I don't suppose a dozen people knew the story, at least not at that time, but I happened to be one of them."

"And what was it?" cried Mignon, as Flora paused in reflection.

"It is not a nice story," said Flora, making a face, and looking half repentantly at Mignon's eager eyes and flushed cheeks, "by no means one to tell to such a little innocent as you, still, as I have begun, I suppose I may as well go on.

"Well, my dear, it seems Mr. Philip had not been married a month, when he opened by accident a letter addressed to his wife. Its contents were such as to make him search among her belongings for others in a like handwriting. He found sufficient to prove

conclusively that he had been profoundly hoodwinked and deceived by the handsome stupid woman he had made his wife. Duly set forth in black and white, he discovered how she had loved, by no means wisely or well, another man, how want of money on both sides had been the barrier between them, how, two months previously, this man had married a woman whom he did not love, and how the hasty step on his part had caused her to accept Philip La Mert's offer. Farther, how she still madly loved this man, nay, had seen him since her marriage, was shortly to see him again, for this cold, sluggish creature, where her passions were concerned, was perfectly reckless, and only by a hair's-breadth did the wording of these letters escape establishing a charge that would for ever have freed her husband from her by law.

"It is said that the subject was never mentioned between them, that she missed the letters and drew her own conclusions, only one thing is certain, that luck having favoured

her in this instance, she took excellent care never to test it again, and thenceforward behaved in so unimpeachable a manner that her greatest enemy could not have found a single stone to throw at her.

"Some people said Mr. Philip was not very much to be pitied. He had married her from motives little less worthy than her own, but he thought himself extremely ill-used (men always do when they find that a woman has not brought a triple dower of innocence, beauty, and goodness, to meet the dry husks that he is graciously pleased to provide), and if he had liked her but little before, now positively loathed her, and with his characteristic promptitude and recklessness, made up his mind that as the law gave *him* no redress, he would compel her to invoke it on her own behalf, and thereupon (for free of her he vowed to be) he ordered his life in such fashion that no woman of any pride or self-respect could be expected to remain under his roof a single day.

"Her family were furious, her friends were prodigal with their pity, she herself made no sign, uttered no complaint, appeared, faultlessly attired, in public as usual, with perfect ease and unconcern, behaved, in short, so like a modern Grissel, that by those who did not know her, she was regarded as a model of wifely long-suffering and forbearance, while those who did, speculated in vain as to what her tactics might be.

"The world in general called her stupid, but the world was mistaken, she was a very clever woman. She had made herself thoroughly acquainted with the law of divorce, and knew that the remedies of husbands and wives were by no means similar. Could her husband have proved her misconduct he could at once have obtained a divorce, but were she to proceed against him she could obtain no more than a judicial separation, under which she would not be free to marry again, and this would by no means have served her ends, so she watched and waited and bided

her time, with a cat-like persistence and patience that must nearly have driven him crazy.

"It was said that again and again she did her utmost to provoke him to strike her, for could she once establish a charge of cruelty her object was gained, but he never stooped so low as that, intensely though he must have been irritated by her presence; and so, foiled in this, she quietly sat down and waited until such time as it should please him openly to desert her.

"Meanwhile the wife of the man she loved died very suddenly, leaving him rich and free. I fancy that under her Spartan cloak of indifference the fox was gnawing her vitals rather cruelly about this time, but she made no sign, received everybody, went everywhere, and answered all polite inquiries concerning her absent husband with incomparable suavity and unconcern, in short, was the wonder of one-half of Dublin, while he was the scandal of the other. Poor Philip! He was a very

black sheep indeed in those days, and all the good people groaned, turned up the whites of their eyes, and passed him by on the other side, though indeed there were fair Samaritans and to spare, more than willing to take out their twopence of kindness, and that with but small chance of recompense!

"We were in Dublin during the courtship; we were there when the young couple returned after the marriage, but soon afterwards Colin whisked me off to those detestable Highlands, and the rest of the story I got from hearsay, though the facts of the case were so simple that they did not admit of much exaggeration, one way or the other. Mr. Philip, then, after conduct that would have worn out the patience of any other woman, but which this exemplary creature endured with great piety and fortitude, one fine morning resigned his commission (he was within six weeks of getting his company), and disappeared altogether, but not, it was said, alone. It was true that Dolly Folliott

disappeared about that time, and though her people hushed it up, saying she had gone abroad for a time, and so on, nobody believed them; she had gone with somebody, but who that somebody was, no one could find out any more than who it was that accompanied Mr. La Mert. He has been seen or heard of from time to time in odd out-of-the-way places, and always, strange to say, with the same woman, who is, if rumour speaks truth, very lovely, and indeed she must be a paragon to have made such a man as he—constant! It was actually said that when he should be free of his wife that he meant to *marry* the woman, and, indeed," she added, shrugging her shoulders, "he had a noble heart, and was generous to a fault, so that it is, alas, only too possible that he might be guilty of even such a crowning folly as that!"

"You call that a folly?" said Mignon, pale with trembling lips, "a folly to keep faith with a gentle loving creature who *trusted*

him? O! for shame, for shame! You *cannot* mean that!"

"My dear child," said Flora placidly, "why do you attempt to talk about things of which you understand nothing? Mr. La Mert's divorce will not make the difference of a rush to him; he will still be welcomed in society, and free to choose a wife out of one of the best families in England, but to *marry* a creature like that would simply be social ruin, and I should say no one was better aware of the fact than he is."

Mignon did not reply. . . . . She was recalling his words on that sole occasion of his wooing, when he had bade her remember always in the days to come how he had loved her in spite of all—all, and she understood now that he was alluding to that poor girl who had loved him, even as it might be Muriel had trusted and loved some other man . . . .

"I think I have told you all the story," said Flora briskly; "all, that is to say, that

is of any consequence. By the way, though, I forgot to say that when Mrs. Philip found herself actually deserted by her husband, she went back to her mother, and there dwelt in the sight of all the world, virtuous, modest, resigned, her every action open to the closest scrutiny, until the two years had elapsed that, as proving unreasonable desertion, alone enabled her to sue for a divorce. She last month obtained it, and in the eyes of the world is a woman without speck or flaw in her moral character, at whom no one, however rash, would dare to point the finger of calumny. She now figures before us for a short time as Miss Dorillon; as soon as decency permits (one is expected to mourn rather longer for a husband of whom the law has just rid one, than if he had merely died), the curtain will fall on that discreetest and most virtuous of young matrons as Mrs. Des Vœux.

"But Mr. Philip—his adventures are by no means over, or I am much mistaken. He

is one of those people who seem born for no other reason than to distinguish themselves in some unfortunate manner, and to whom death itself does not come in the common way.

"He looked as though things were going very wrong with him," shaking her head. "I never saw any one so fearfully changed. I wish I could have spoken to him—though, for goodness' sake, child," she added hastily, as the carriage rolled swiftly round the plot of evergreens opposite Rosemary, and the horses drew up before the door with a flourish, "don't tell either father or Colin that I meditated any such crime, for I verily believe that they would consider His Satanic Majesty an agreeable, harmless sort of companion, compared with the man whose history I have just given you!"

CHAPTER XI.

"Mistress, know yourself; down on your knees
And thank heaven fasting for a good man's love."

"TRUE," said Mignon, "don't you think that if one got married at all, it would be better to marry somebody that one *loved?*"

"Yes, Miss Mignon, I do."

"And would you consider it a very bad thing for a person to run away with somebody else, if he or she had a wife or husband that it was not possible to like or *respect?*"

"I should think it just about as bad as bad could be," said Prue, in horror; "people

as like each other well enough to marry ought to stick together as well for *worse* as for better."

"But supposing," said Mignon, "that they didn't get married because they liked each other—indeed rather the contrary than otherwise—why, what then, Prue?"

Somebody who was busying himself with a blown-down creeper outside the open window, and had perforce heard every word of the foregoing conversation, involuntarily made a step forward, as though to see what expression the speaker's face wore, as she asked Prue the question with which her speech concluded.

Instantly checking himself, however, he threw down the garden implement he held, and moved quickly away.

"What was that?" exclaimed Prue, hearing the sound of retreating footsteps, then, advancing to the window, and looking out, her face became anxious as she recognised in the vanishing personage, Adam. "O,

Miss Mignon," she said, turning back, "that was the master, and he must have heard every word that you said!"

God forgive the girl if the ungenerous thought flashed through her mind that he was at his old tricks again, *listening*. She had been thinking very often during the past weeks of those unauthorised peeps over the wall to which he had confessed, and it was significant of some growth in her feelings, whether of like or of dislike, that such should be the case, for until very lately she had thought too little of him in any way to reflect with heat upon his misdeeds.

"And why should I mind if he did hear me?" she said proudly; "is he an ogre that you should always be saying 'Miss Mignon, you must not say this, and you must not say that, for master won't like it?'"

"He's no ogre," said Prue, "he's real good. There's them as has nasty corners and nooks in their hearts out of which a little nasty devil pops every now and then, and gives you a

scare, and there's them as seems better and better the longer you lives with them, and never surprises you but with something pleasant; and master's one of 'em, as you'll find out some day, Miss Mignon."

Long ago Prue had dropped Mignon's matronly prefix, habit proving too strong for her.

"And do you suppose I have not found that out already?" said Mignon; "do you suppose that a single day passes that I do not tell myself how much I owe him, and what a miserable, homeless little wretch I should be if he had not taken pity on and married me?"

She concluded her speech with one of those old wilful stamps of the foot that had lately been so conspicuous by their absence, and that Prue had grown to miss rather sadly.

"Eh!" she said, looking in astonishment at the girl, "it's not *that* way, dear heart, he'd be wishing you to think, to say nothing of its not being the truth, Miss Mignon, for don't

we all know as how he married you for pure love, and nothing else besides ?"

"You don't understand, Prue," said the girl, turning aside ; "he asked me because—because it was his nature to be good and kind, and he pretended to want me very badly that I might not feel he was doing me a great favour, but he cannot hide from me, no, nor from himself, that he is sorry now for what he did so hastily, and I—" She threw down the needlework, and covered her scarlet face with both her hands, "I wake up sometimes in the night and blush all over when I think it is all my own doing, that if I had not *called him* that evening, probably I should never have seen him again ; he would not even have *thought* of such a thing as marrying me !"

"He thought of it long afore that," said Prue with decision ; "he've watched you growing up this two years and allers meant to get you sooner or later. And as to his being sorry, Miss Mignon, why that's a most re-

diklous idea; it ain't prating of love as proves it, it's actions, and master's good enough at *they*."

"He promised to help me find *her*; but do you know"—she pressed nearer to the woman, looking anxiously at her with lovely, troubled eyes—"that sometimes I almost think that it would not trouble him very much if my poor love *never* came back to me at all?"

Prue, with a strange pang at her heart, looked back into the wistful, childish face so near her own, and said never a word.

Trouble was beginning to tell upon the girl; constant thought and restless wakeful nights were by degrees robbing her of that lovely look of youth that, let folks say what they will, is not compensated for by any after beauty of expression, intellect, or the chastened peace that is the crown of great suffering. Already the softness on brow and lip, the unworn look that is never seen upon the face of the man or woman who in the battle of life has borne the burden and heat of the day,

was fading away, and dark shadows were beginning to be apparent beneath the blue eyes that two months ago were lustrous with health and spirits.

Her voice, too, had grown starved and thin, and in no one respect does the weal or woe of the soul and body show so unmistakably as in the quality of the voice. The round full notes that come straight from the joyous heart tell their own tale, even as do those others that speak of a life barren and destitute of the love and nourishment it demands.

"*He* seemed to understand," she went on, thinking aloud. "That day, that awful, never-to-be-forgotten day, I don't think he could have been more sorry and distressed if it had been his own sister; and if he had not been there to tell me it was not my darling I think I should have gone quite mad,"—she paused, growing rigid, and turning as white as snow.

"Oh!" said Prue, who had looked

thoroughly mystified, "you mean Mr. Rideout, Miss Mignon? Ah, well! I don't reckon you owe much thanks to *him* about nothing! Many's the time I've been down on my bones in a regler bust of thanksgiving that 'twas master you married, not him!"

"He would have helped me to find her," said Mignon, starting up restlessly. "I could not tell any one why I *did*, why I *do* feel that he was interested in Muriel, that he knew her, had spoken to her; how else could he have told me that day that . . . . *it* was not her?"

Prue shook her head doubtfully, but made no reply. With dismay, the woman had beheld the gradual change in Mignon's attitude towards this lover who had formerly pleased her no whit, either in looks or ways, while with even greater concern she recognised the relations that existed between the young husband and wife, and sorrowfully enough foresaw that there was trouble in store for the

girl whom she had so fondly believed to be safely placed beyond the storm and struggle of life.

It was not for Prue to guess how, gradually but surely, Philip La Mert had assumed in Mignon's mind the character of a friend to, even a deliverer of, Muriel, and how he was consequently exalted in the girl's mind (no matter how unworthy he might be in other respects) into a creature who called forth her warmest gratitude, while Adam, alas! was fast becoming to her the cold and indifferent guardian, who had no sympathy with either her love or anxiety for Muriel, and who, if he would not actually hold up his hand to keep her back, would assuredly not raise it to help her.

And in her heart she said that it was all of a piece with the rest of his behaviour, that he should have broken his promise of helping to find Muriel—though in this she was unjust, for what opportunity had as yet offered for either of them to do aught but sit quietly

down, and wait? And even as she was engrossed by her selfish thoughts and sorrow, so perhaps was he by his. Moreover there was a reason why the merest allusion to Muriel's return should be intolerable to him; more than ever complicated had matters become of late, and there were times when he felt himself absolutely appalled at the possibilities of the future.

"Sometimes I think," said the girl, clasping her little hands upon her heart and sighing wofully, "that after all Miss Sorel was right and I am wrong, and that she will never come back: or perhaps she has grown as weary of her life as that poor *grisette* did, and *somewhere* she is lying cold, and drowned and stiff, just like that other. . . . There is scarcely a night that I do not wake up with that face before me, and then I long with all my heart to see *him*, who will tell me that I am mistaken, that it is not so; for do you know that for a long while he lived in Dublin, and most likely saw her there, and that was why he

was able to tell me that what I saw was not my darling ?"

"Young ladies as has any care for their good names isn't likely to see much of *him*," said Prue thoughtlessly, "leastways I mean, Miss Mignon——"

"What do you know of him I should like to know," cried Mignon passionately, "that you take upon yourself to say he is this or that ? To hear people talk one would think he was the wickedest man that ever lived, instead of being ill-used and deceived just like anybody else, for I am sure he looks sad and miserable enough to make *any one* pity him !"

"He did look very bad when he went away from here," said Prue, relenting a little, "but there, his heart was just as wicked as ever, as was easy to tell by the way he ran on when—" she paused abruptly.

"He found me gone," said Mignon. "But what did he say, and was he unconscious long ?"

"He come to himself soon after you went," said Prue reluctantly. "What did he say, miss? 'Twould be foolish work to repeat it; he was mad and angry, and folks never mean what they say when they're like that—I've forgot."

"And did you tell him we had gone to Paris?" persisted Mignon, who had never been able to induce Prue to give her a circumstantial account of what occurred that day after her departure.

"I? no, indeed!" said Prue in horror.

"Then it *was* by chance that we met him there," said Mignon half aloud, "pure chance—though indeed," she added, sighing, "it was a very lucky one, for if we had not, Prue, I think I should be where Silas Sorel is now."

"Ah! poor man!" said Prue, shivering, "really them few days after that telegram came, was regler battle, murder, and sudden death, nothing but horrid things coming one a-top of another, and not time to draw breath, so to speak, between 'em!"

"Tell me about Silas," said the girl, drawing nearer to the woman; "you've only told me about it in fits and starts, and I want to hear it right through from beginning to end."

"Well, Miss Mignon," said Prue, threading her needle with an air of importance, "'twas about five o'clock in the afternoon, and I'd pretty nigh got over the fright Mr. Rideout had give me, and was having a bit of a cry in the kitchen, when who should walk straight in but Mr. Sorel.

"He stood looking at me a minute, then said: 'So that pair of fools has got married, have they?'

"Said I: 'If you mean my master and mistress, sir, they have.'

"He pulled down the corners of his lips at that, and said: 'How was it you didn't go with 'em? I 'spose three simpletons could travel about as well as two?'

"So I said, 'I didn't know as any of us was more foolish than our neighbours, and I'd only stopped in the house because I didn't

like to leave it to itself (cook being gone and all) till he sent somebody in to take charge of it.' Not to mention, Miss Mignon, that you'd give me most perticler orders to sit down outside the gates (as soon as he'd turned me out) and not stir from 'em night and day till you come back, in case Miss Muriel should walk in unexpected, and find nobody here."

"Did I really tell you to do that, Prue?" said Mignon, smiling in spite of herself.

"You did, Miss Mignon, and though I'd have done my best, still I couldn't quite promise to do that.

"Well, Mr. Sorel he looked me up and down sharp like, and then said he, 'I may find you useful by-and-by, so just you stop where you are, and don't leave this house till I tell you to,' which I thought pretty good imperence; but as stopping in the house was a sight better than hanging about outside, with the perlice for everlasting telling you to keep moving on, why I thought I'd stop and see what 'd come next.

"Mr. Sorel he went upstairs and all over the house, looking here and there, and everywhere, and last of all he went into poor missus's room, and shut the door.

"I didn't hear a sound of him till 'twas nearly dark, then he rang the bell and I went up. He was sitting before her writing-table, with his head bent down over something in his hand, but when I come back with the light he'd told me to bring, his hand was empty, and his eyes was hard and dry as stones. He said I was to wait, opened the desk and took out a piece of paper Miss Sorel had set just inside. 'Twas a list of the names and addresses of all the young ladies as had been at Rosemary for the half before, and was expected for the next, and he read 'em out to me one by one, and asked me if they was all right. I told him yes, and then he said I could go down, he'd call me when I was wanted, and I saw no more of him till half-past ten o'clock, when he come down with a great budget of letters, and said he, putting

one of his fingers on 'em, 'You'll never see any more of these young ladies again, for I've written to tell 'em my sister is dead—is dead.' Just like that, then he stared about him a bit confused-like, and went away without saying any more.

"Next morning he come again, and said he was going away for a while, but I was to take care of the place, and not let a soul come nigh it but tradespeople. He'd got to look very broken and ill, and stared about as if it was all strange to him, and once or twice he got suspicious, and asked me where you might be, and if you was likely to be coming back, and if I dared to let you come inside the gates he would punish me by the law; but for all his talk he seemed just spent-like and feeble, and as if he'd got no strength to go into a passion about it. And then he went away, I think 'twas somewhere to see about her tomb, for he'd took her all the way from Paris back to her old home to be buried.

"'Twas a fortnight before he came back,

and then he looked worse than ever. He told me to make up a bed in the room next Miss Sorel's, and when night come, he just crept into it.

"The next day he wrote a letter and gave it to me to post, and I looked hard at it to know the address again, for he seemed to me to be going very queer, and I was getting in a fright to know what I should do if he got real bad. He scarcely touched nothing, and snapped and snarled at me if I tried to get him to eat, but 'twas all over very soon. On the third day after he come back, I heard a strange sort of noise upstairs about the time of dusk, and though I was terrible frightened, being all alone in the house, I crept upstairs and listened, and the door being open of Miss Sorel's room, I looked in.

"He was kneeling by the bedside with his arms spread out over the coverlid, and talking to her, like as if he thought she was there, seeming to fancy they was both little children again together, and going out in the

woods a-maying . . . . and then I knew how it was with him, Miss Mignon, and just shut the door and come softly away, for somehow I wasn't a bit afraid of the poor soul; but I wrote off to the address I'd seen, and by the next evening a gentleman, Mr. Sorel's cousin he said he was, had come.

"Mr. Silas didn't seem to know him a bit, only laughed and cried all in a breath, when they tried to take him home, but at last they got him away by telling him he would find *her* there. He was but a few years older than Miss Sorel, yet you'd have said he was an old man, Miss Mignon, as they led him away, and you never would have known him to be the same as said such wicked words to you out yon, when master come over the wall to the rescue.

"The cousin, he put me in charge of all while he went to Yorkshire, but he was soon back again, and asked me about things, and without more ado he just went to an agent, and said Mr. Sorel wasn't likely to be ever

any better, and as he was next-of-kin and had to act for Mr. Silas, he'd be glad to get rid of Rosemary, and Mr. Montrose's agent being on the look-out, it all got managed very easy and quick, for all the world just like a fairy tale I used to think. I didn't write nothing to you till 'twas all done, but master he knew all about it. There was a sight of letters come from Mr. Sorel, and I handed 'em over to the cousin, and there was two or three for me, one in perticler from Miss Lu-Lu, wanting to know all about it, and where you was, and what you meant to do. So I just wrote and said you was married, and I guess, Miss Mignon, she didn't get over *that* bit of news for a week."

"We had some happy times together, she and I," said Mignon with a heavy sigh: "what fun we used to have over that book we were writing, and that we shall *never* finish now! I miss the girls," she went on sadly, "and the noise they made, and the hard lessons we had to learn. At any rate, our

days were well filled, we had not over much time to *think!* You know I always dreaded the holidays, always found it dreadfully dull to talk to Bumble and play croquet all alone, but now that it is one long indefinite holiday, with no day to look forward to when they will all be coming back again, it is *much* worse, and if *she* does not come, it may go on for ever, and ever, *and ever!* Indeed, I've got a dreadful sort of feeling, Prue, that if anybody happened to be walking by Rosemary a hundred years hence, he would find you an old mummy in the kitchen, Mr. Montrose melted into a mound of dust in the midst of his books, and me sitting on the wooden chair in the kitchen garden, watching still for somebody who never came!"

CHAPTER XII.

"The education of life perfects the thinking mind, but depraves the frivolous."

"THE mystic hour draws nigh," said Flora, "that will consign us one and all to the dungeon keep of Glen-luce.

"To-day is the sixth, on the tenth a procession of men and women, footmen and maids, children, babies, horses, dogs, and animals will be formed; father, being the least competent for the post, will assume the *bâton* of command, and having fussed one half of us into tears and the other half into active ill-temper, will land us all triumphantly at the ancestral barn somewhere towards the

small hours of the morning. Why on earth cannot balloons be made practicable for travelling purposes I wonder? Just fancy the delight of stepping in, bag and baggage, and not having to stir until one got to one's journey's end! I have no doubt our grandchildren will enjoy the luxury, while we have to suffer for being born a hundred years too soon!"

"But why is Glen-luce like a dungeon?" said Mignon, who sat on the grass with hands clasped about her knees, and a weary look in her blue eyes.

"How can a place be anything else when there is scarcely a soul in it, who is not your husband, or your father, or your brother? People rave about the scenery, and ask me how I can be dull in the midst of so much beauty; but I should like to know who would not get sick of looking at the same thing day after day, week after week, year after year! Can trees and rocks and waterfalls *talk* to you, I should like to know? Admiring the

beauties of nature all alone is something like looking at the moon by yourself, extremely unsatisfactory work !"

"But I thought you had some neighbours ?" said Mignon, "the McCloskys."

"Just so, my dear, *the* McCloskys, for there is nobody else. We are five miles from the nearest town, three from a doctor, two from the kirk, and ten from anything like a pleasant or entertaining neighbour. Bluebeard himself would be hailed with rejoicing if he rose from the dead and settled down in Glenluce."

"And your father's house, where is that ?"

"Strathsaye ? Oh, near enough. The Montrose and Dundas estates adjoin each other ; I don't know of any other reason why father gave his consent to my marrying Colin. There never was a father yet to whom a ring-fence was not irresistible, you know. It must have been a dreadful blow to him about the McClosky estates," she added, shaking her smooth head ; "he had quite set his heart on

Adam's marrying the daughter, and then the whole of the Glen would have been in the family."

"And was the young lady—willing?" said Mignon, turning her head aside.

"Yes; in that case Barkis *was* willing. But where was I? Oh! talking about that dreadful old barn. Of course when I married Colin I had no idea those two old people, Sir Peter and his wife, would take it into their heads to live in the town-house and give us the one in the Highlands. What on earth can they want with a house in Piccadilly I should like to know, at their time of life? And, of course, as they are within reach of the best advice, they are as likely as not to live *for ever!*"

"But is not Colin attached to them?" said Mignon, regarding Flora with warm disapproval.

"Oh! I believe so—especially to his mother; indeed, it is all her doing that he has such absurdly narrow-minded ideas about

everything. However, she is a sensible old soul, and never attempts to interfere with me in any way, and as I come to town every spring, and it is less trouble and expense than taking a furnished house, I never quarrel with her.

"And has your father lived here long?" said Mignon, glancing at the pleasant-looking white house whose upper windows were visible in the distance.

"Oh! yes, a long time, six or sèven years quite. He spends one half the year here, and the other half at Strathsaye; but my charming brother, since he has become studious, lives here pretty well all the year round. It was a most ridiculous place to come to, not sufficiently near town to be convenient, and yet not far enough out to command good grounds and real country. However, you'll have country enough and to spare at Glen-luce for the next three months, *I* can tell you!"

"But I am not going," said Mignon, thoroughly startled; "why should I do that?

How can I do that? At any moment somebody may come."—She paused, blushed deeply and said no more.

"Somebody may come?" repeated Flora, looking at the girl's averted face with suddenly aroused, quick curiosity, "but I thought there was *nobody*—that you had no relations, no friends, no anything—who then may be this mysterious *somebody?*"

Mignon, turning her head still farther aside, shamed through and through at the deceit she was maintaining, none the less found it impossible to put confidence in Flora Dundas.

That young matron, laying down her needlework, was meanwhile surveying the girl from an entirely new point of view. What did this confusion mean . . . . after all, was the explanation of Mignon's coldness to her husband, to be found in the fact that she had, in schoolgirl fashion, fixed her childish heart upon somebody else?

If so, what a glorious punishment was

in store for Adam the gardener, to be sure!

"Upon my word, child, you began pretty early," she said at last with some envy in her voice; "how you ever got opportunities for such jinks I'm sure I don't know; *I* didn't when I was at school. There was one young man," she added meditatively, "that I positively adored—I actually lost my appetite on his account for a whole week—and though, of course, we never exchanged a word, we used to write each other love-letters, but in case we were found out, *he* used to sign himself 'Lily-white,' and *I* used to sign myself 'The Rat-catcher's Daughter.' We put our letters in a hole in the wall just outside the garden gates, but one fine morning we were caught, so there was an end of *that;* but I'm sure my heart never thumped as hard and fast for Colin, as it did for that moon-faced young man in drab inexpressibles!"

As though to illustrate the adage, Colin himself at this moment appeared upon the

scene with his idolised little daughter Floss perched high on his shoulders.

With one hand he held her chubby legs firmly under his chin, the other thrown behind him afforded her a sufficient support, while his hair had all the appearance of being triumphantly crowned, as the tiny hands that clutched it were full of flowers.

"Do for goodness' sake put that child down," said Flora as they drew near; "what you can be made of to drag her about in such heat as this, I'm sure I can't imagine!"

"We don't find the heat particularly overpowering, do we, Floss?" said Colin, placidly, as he gently lowered himself to the grass beside Mignon, and set Floss's feet upon the ground; "and we're very happy, aren't we?"

"We're very 'appy," said Floss, looking across her father's head at her mother, with that half-impudent, half alarmed defiance that is so ludicrous when exhibited by mere babies to those whom they know to be set in authority over them.

"I can *not* understand how it is," said Mrs. Dundas crossly, "that every one of my children should drop their h's as they do. They never hear me drop mine, and I am always most particular in engaging my nurses to ascertain that they speak correctly, but it is all of no use, for neither Taffy, Colin, nor Floss have got one single 'h' between them!"

"It saves a lot of trouble, doesn't it, Floss?" said Colin, around whose neck his little daughter's arms were now clasped in a throttling embrace. A very wilful blooming little rose was she, her face a tiny and absurd copy of her mother's, but with a heart like her father's beating bravely in her breast.

"How you *can* talk such nonsense to the child!" said Flora languidly. "Really it is not to be wondered at that you have no authority over the children, and that I always have to punish and keep them in order myself!"

Flora's notions of the management of

children were extremely simple, and resolved themselves into two processes—spoiling and slapping. When they were good, and looked handsome enough to be a credit to herself, she would indulge them just so far as such indulgence did not interfere with her own personal comfort; when they were naughty or tired, or unsatisfactory in any way, she slapped them, and between these two extremes she never hesitated for a single moment. The workings of the infant minds given over to her keeping were puzzles that she never dreamed of trying to solve.

Colin understood all about it, and could talk nonsense to them by the hour. But, O careless mother, it was wise, tender, gentle nonsense that it would have been well for you, could your lips have brought themselves to utter . . . .

"Floss shall be taught the ten commandments without loss of time," said Colin gravely, "and then perhaps she will better understand her duty to her father. Mean

while, if the question be not an impertinent one, do we interrupt a cabinet council? If so, we will retire, and come back when it is over."

"We were talking about the approaching exodus," said Flora, "and I have been discoursing in vain to Mignon on the varied delights of Glen-luce, for—what do you think?—she says she is *not going!*"

"Not going!" repeated Colin in tones of amazement, and turning quickly towards Mignon, "and why not? Are you afraid that—that you will not be comfortable with us?"

"Don't trouble yourself on that point," said Flora tranquilly; "I have not been ill-using the child, and we never fight; she can't go because, because she is expecting somebody!"

"But can't you bring whoever it is with you?" said Colin with real anxiety, for independently of his firm friendship for Adam, he liked this girl; the two had been fast friends from their first hour of meeting, and he had

looked forward to having them both to brighten the not too lively Glen-luce.

"No," said Mignon, drooping her head, "I cannot bring that person with me, and I must stay here; but Adam will not mind going without me, I am sure——"

"Go *without* you?" said Flora, her voice rising a little higher with every word, "and leave you here alone?"

"Yes, why not? I have Prue to take care of me, though what harm is likely to come to me at Rosemary?"

"Oh!" said Flora ironically, "I don't know of anybody who is prepared to eat you up at a mouthful, and of course it is the most natural thing in the world for a young man to go away and leave his bride of a few weeks all by herself! Indeed, I have little doubt but that you will be able to carry out the arrangement, as, if there is one reasonable amusement on earth that Adam has the sense to enjoy, it is his shooting."

"Of course, he will not go without Mignon,"

said Colin, trying to keep the disappointment out of his voice.

"I am by no means so sure of that," said Flora decidedly. "However, wonderful to relate, here he comes, so you can ask him for yourself!"

"But I do not wish him to remain with me," said Mignon earnestly; "I shall be *rejoiced* for him to go; it will be a change for him, and—"

"What is Mignon going to be so rejoiced about?" said Adam, throwing himself down on the grass beside Colin, and giving Floss's downy cheek a pinch.

"At the prospect of remaining at Rosemary all by herself," said Flora with a shrug, "for she says she is not going to Glen-luce."

"She is expecting somebody," said honest Colin, at which his wife frowned, laughed, and then looked at Adam to see how he took the remark.

He was looking at his wife, marking how

"A paleness beauteous as the lily's mix't
With the sweet violet's, like a gust of wind
Flits o'er her face . . . ."

and his thoughts, through much brooding, having now become unhealthy and coloured with but one idea, the conclusion was instantly formed in his own mind, that this somebody was Philip.

There was an instant's pause, then he spoke.

"It would be strange," he said calmly, "if my wife should wish to go to Glen-luce, since I remain here. I have work that must be done, and cannot spare the time."

One person alone out of the three who heard, believed him to be speaking the truth. She clasped her hands with a gesture that might have been relief, disappointment, or surprise.

"*Well*," said Flora, drawing a deep breath, and addressing Mignon. "I should very much like to see Colin give up his shooting or anything else for *me*. Not that I complain, fortunately I am not selfish, and though of course I should infinitely prefer taking the children to Cowes or Scarborough that they

might have the benefit of the sea air, still I hope I know my duty as a wife, and—what is more—do it."

"Ah!" said Colin, who was tying up a nosegay for Floss with a dry wisp of grass.

Flora glanced sharply at her husband, but he appeared so perfectly innocent and absorbed in his task, that she looked away again.

"Mignon's duty in this case is identical with my own," said Adam dryly, "so I need not call upon her to make any sacrifice on my behalf. When do you go, old fellow?" he added, turning to Colin.

"On the 10th."

"Poor Miss McClosky!" said Flora maliciously, "she will be in despair! Half a loaf is better than no bread, and doubtless she would prefer seeing the married man to not seeing him at all."

"You have no right to talk about Phillis in such a manner," said Colin indignantly, "a more modest girl never breathed—and I

won't hear her name taken in vain, the sonsie, gentle, wee body."

"Her name is Phillis?" said Mignon eagerly.

"Yes," he said, "and it exactly suits her."

Phillis . . . what a pretty old-world name. To Mignon it brought up the picture of a fresh, rosy, dimpled, country maiden, with a something coy and winsome about her that is not usually associated with our notions of the daughter of a *parvenu* cotton-spinner.

"Phillis would not deny the soft impeachment if she were here," said Flora, serenely. "I do believe that if she tried to tell a good big story it would choke her on the spot. She is a little fool who doesn't know her own advantages, for, in spite of that terrible red brick mansion, and McClosky *père*, she might, with her quarter of a million of money and little dollish, presentable person, marry almost anybody."

"What would a young woman do with Mr. Anybody for a husband?" said Colin gravely,

"and Phillis is rather particular—she might object."

"She has got some absurd rubbish into her head," continued Flora, pursuing her own train of thought, "that it is her money that everybody is in love with, not herself, and I should not wonder in the least at any imprudent thing she did; she would marry a shoeblack, I verily believe, if she thought he was disinterested!"

"She may even descend to the lower deeps of the columns of the *Matrimonial News*," said Colin, in feigned alarm, "and get married on the sly as

"'A penniless lass wi' a lang pedigree,'

while the curtain might descend on the affecting *tableau* of Phillis presenting the gentleman with her money-bags as the reward of virtue!"

"And what is Mr. McClosky like?" said Mignon, who seemed to have been steadily asking questions ever since she got up that morning.

"I can compare him to nothing on earth so much as his house!" said Flora, fanning herself with vigour. "The latter is of red brick, that makes you glow all over to look at on the coldest December day, and it matches the colour of his cheeks and nose exactly, while the pale-blue satin furniture in the drawing-room (where the carpet is deeply, darkly, beautifully red), seems expressly made to extinguish his vacuous rolling eye; the only difference is, that his crest, which is upon everything—over the mirrors, on the cornices, the door-handles (on the very bottoms of the chairs, I do believe, if one only had the courage to surreptitiously examine them), is *not* emblazoned on his back, though the jewellery he wears stands sponsor handsomely for the *bricklebrack*, as he calls it, in his drawing-room!"

"Poor Phillis!" said Mignon softly.

"When it was all completed," said Flora, "he walked about with his hands under his coat-tails, saying to everybody, 'Everything

very plain, ma'am, but—neat.' It did remind me so of 'Neat, but not gaudy, as the Devil said when he painted his tail pea-green.'"

"Nevertheless," said Colin, stoutly, "not even a red and blue drawing-room, a yellow and green boudoir, or a ball-room tastefully arranged in pink and mauve, can vulgarise Phillis. In her plain gown, without an ornament or scrap of finery, she holds her own bravely enough, and not one of the high-born lassies who go there can put her out of countenance. The only mistake was that she should have been born a rich girl, instead of a moderately poor one."

"Oh! it is all very fine," said Flora, with trenchant emphasis, "for those people with whom money is a mere drug, a superfluity, to affect to despise it, but just let them be without it for a little while, and then see if they would talk in that ridiculous fashion! For my part, short of death, I know of *nothing* more agonising than to be constantly wanting things one can't get. Talk about a good

conscience, why a good fat purse is twice as comforting and conducive to sound moral feeling, and for my part I can't understand rich people doing wicked things. I'm sure I could be perfectly good and amiable if I had everything on earth that I fancied!"

"No doubt!" said Colin, adding, as he rubbed his cheek against his little daughter's, "nevertheless *we* know of something far worse than a pocket without any money in it, don't we, Floss? And that is to put our hand in, and find no sweeties!"

Floss shook her head gravely and sighed; *that* was bad and no mistake.

"I'se got an 'ole shilling," she said, patting his cheeks lovingly, "and you sall 'ave it all. P'raps mummy let us go to Lunnun t'morrow to spend it?"

"Oh! Floss, Floss! you are a very extravagant young woman with your one shilling!" said Colin. "Now do you know that if you came into a fortune to-morrow, of say a pound, all in sixpences, you would become

a perfect little screw, and drive Colin and Taffy away with ignominy when they came to borrow a penny or twopence of you ?"

"Really," said Flora with contempt, "I do wonder at your folly, Colin ; you will make the child just as whimsical and ridiculous as yourself !"

Colin turned his head, which was on a level with Floss's, and looked at her. The smile on his face was reflected in the many dimples of hers, but he did not speak ; there was never any need for speech with these two ; between the somewhat weary man of thirty-six and the joyous fresh young child of four, there existed a very perfect understanding. Worn out and disgusted as he often was by the follies of his wife, he could find it in his heart to forgive her all, when the touch of his daughter's tiny hands were about him, when he looked into those innocent crystal clear eyes and found in them nothing but absolute purity and love.

His heart might have grown arid and

bitter but for this cool and quiet shadow that the child made in it, and through his love for her he became a better, more patient, and self-denying man than he had been without her. A child . . . . that will come to you of its own free will, that will look fearlessly into your eyes, put out its scrap of a hand to touch your face, that will trust you, love you, obey and follow you without a single doubt or scruple—is there any other God-given thing on earth that will so waken the good, so quell the evil that dwells in us? He who would keep heart and lips and life clean, let him go as often as may be into the company of very young children, win their love if he is able, and then thank God for the humanising, ennobling influence they will have upon him.

A little silence followed on Flora's petulant apostrophe to her husband.

Adam was looking at Mignon, noting all too plainly the weary droop of the slender figure, the enforced patience of the empty

hands, and the outline of features as colourless as the gown she wore.

Colin, too, was regarding his wife attentively, and wondering what had happened that morning to ruffle her usually placid brows. He knew her thoroughly, this wife of his, her follies, her weaknesses, her overweening vanity, her profound selfishness; his taste was outraged, his heart was wrung by her every day of his life, and yet—he loved her.

It may be questioned whether love does not strengthen with the faults of the person beloved, instead of growing weaker.

We may regret our passion, we may even struggle fiercely against it, but struggle and pain alike serve but to rivet the chains the deeper, and each fresh instance of worthlessness, though it may wound our hearts, has no power to touch the core of our allegiance. "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out."

We are not all so sternly made that we can

act upon the cruel command, and to Colin, sorely tried though he might be, no such remedy would ever present itself. He had married this woman, and he would abide by the consequences of his deed.

There is something noble and pathetic in these silent heroes who stand so staunchly by their trumpery bargains, only thankful if the world do not see the rents and stains, the coarse veneer and tawdry gilding as plainly as they themselves do, who utter no complaint, give no sign, and are by the world in general accepted as poor sightless doting fools, who have neither eyes to perceive, nor wit to recognise their own disgrace.

"Here is father!" exclaimed Flora in tones of consternation; "his face is as long as my arm; he has a bundle of formidable papers, his very waistcoat looks as if it is primed and loaded with dry-as-dust facts, that will assuredly give us all moral apoplexy! I fancy I hear baby crying—indeed I am sure of it"—in a moment lace, work, scissors, and

thimble were rolled securely up, and with that nimble dexterity which would seem to be one of the especial prerogatives of the fat ones of the earth, she had glided round a corner, and was lost to sight in a moment.

CHAPTER XIII.

"*Julia.* His little speaking shows his love but small.
Lucetta. Fire that is closest kept burns most of all."

"MAN proposes; God disposes." It was not disposed that Flora and her family should depart for Glen-luce, with her husband and father, on the 10th.

On the morning of the 9th, Mignon, in the midst of one of those breathless struggles with the intricacies of the butcher's book, in which she had felt it her duty to engage since her discovery that Adam was not rich, found herself all at once confronted by the disreputable little person of Colin the Younger. Always

remarkable for the ease of his toilet, he looked to-day as though he had been a focus for the four winds of heaven, and, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, was about as forlorn-looking an urchin of five as could well be met with on a summer's day.

"Oh! *poor* little Taffy!" he said, shaking his head, "he's very ill; got weazles, and *such* a pain in his tummick!"

"Taffy has got the measles!" she said. "Then mamma won't go to the Highlands to-morrow?"

"No," he said gravely. "Grandpa and father's goin' t'morrow; *we*'se not goin'; and mummy's slapped us all round, and sent Taffy to bed."

"Oh, she has, has she?" said Mignon, laughing outright. "Poor little souls!"

Then a thought came into her head that put the woes of Taffy and his brethren out of it, and she jumped up so hastily as to deposit the representatives of butcher, grocer, and baker, in a heap on the ground.

"You must run home now, Colin," she said absently; "and by-and-by if Taffy likes, I'll come over and tell him all about 'Puss in Boots.'"

"That's what I'se come for," said Colin the Younger, practically; "me stealed out all 'lone; mummy didn't know, nurse didn't know, *nobody* knowed, and I'se to give you Taffy's most *pertitler* love, and you'se to come over d'reckly; and nurse says he *may* eat barley-sugar and bistiks, but no candies and no cokoly creams—Taffy says."

"I'll come presently," said Mignon, smiling again; and then the small tatterdemalion vanished, and she found herself hurrying out, at a great pace, so possessed by one idea, that not until she had reached the inner garden, and was actually in Adam's presence, did she recall the fact that the day when she had gone to him with any notion that might come into her head had passed, and that perhaps he would be as much surprised at her appearance, as she was at herself for coming. Adam

saw her approaching, and noted how the eager step changed suddenly to a lagging one, how the bright face became clouded and dull, and he said to himself that it was because she had expected to find the garden empty, and was disappointed at finding *him* there.

He stood awaiting her, some slight tool in his hand; he wore no hat, and was in his shirt-sleeves: so Mignon, looking up as she drew near to him, saw him for the last time in her life as Adam the gardener.

Whither had departed the ample stock of words with which she had started off to him in such a prodigious hurry?

Not one word could she find to say, except:

"Taffy's got the measles."

"Yes?" he said, and waited for more.

She stood, folding a corner of her little apron round and round her forefinger, then took a covert glance at his face as though in hopes of finding something there to encourage her.

She found nothing; he was awaiting her next words with attention, no more.

"Of course they will not be able to go to the Highlands now," she said in a lame, hesitating fashion; "at least Flora and the children will not—but Mr. Montrose and Colin are going to-morrow."

"I suppose so."

"And I was thinking," she said, feeling strangely disheartened, and hanging her head down, "that as Flora and the children will be here, and you will have no need to think me lonely, or be uneasy about leaving me, perhaps you too would go and have a good time at Strathsaye—and may I tell Prue to get your things ready so that you will be able to start to-morrow?"

"No," he said; "you will tell Prue to do nothing of the kind. Do you think I have a mind like a weathercock," he added, half-bitterly, half-sternly, "that I can change it every hour in the day to please you, Mignon?"

"No," she said gently, "but I cannot help

thinking, though you said it was the work prevented you, that it was because of me that you decided not to go, and now that it is all quite pleasant and natural that you should accompany your father and Colin, it is a pity, a very great pity, for you to stay here, for you will be thinking of the shooting every day."

"If ever I am compelled to leave my wife under the care of any one," he said, "I trust it will be somebody more competent to accept the trust than my sister Flora. It seems a hard thing for a brother to say of his own flesh and blood, but I disapprove of her in every way, and consider her a very bad companion for you. Had she been permanently established where she now is, I could not, even for your sake, have settled in this house."

"She is very good-humoured," pleaded Mignon, "and she does not mean all the things she says; it is only her way——"

"It is a very bad way," he said with dis-

gust, "and unfortunately it is ten thousand times worse when she is abroad, than when she is at home; a housemaid would know better how to behave herself in public than she!"

Mignon looked up quickly, wondering if he were alluding to Flora's follies on the day when she had caught that one precious, passing glimpse of Philip.

"Her choice of companions is in about as bad taste as her dress and manner," continued Adam; "all her friends are fops, fools, or worse, and her women acquaintances are not much better. She has a weakness for men of doubtful character—" he paused to look keenly at Mignon, whose eyes were downcast, "and, in direct defiance of Colin's command, will encourage their attentions, whenever she gets a chance. She may even introduce such persons to you." He paused again, closely watching her features for any betraying sign. He had seen Philip La Mert in the Park that day; he knew his sister to be acquainted

with him, and he was burning to know if Mignon had been brought face to face with, had spoken to him.

But Mignon did not utter a syllable. Her husband had once bade her carry her confidences to any one rather than himself, and she had taken him at his word.

All at once he became conscious that tears were starting from beneath her eyelids, that her lips were taking the odd, convulsive curves of one who fights against emotion that will not be repressed.

He saw these tears with a strange indifference, irritation of mind had begotten a temporary hardness of heart, and the appetite for wooing had so entirely left him of late, that he did not feel the smallest temptation to entreat her to dry them. She herself could not have told why she wept, save that all things with her now tended towards tears, as formerly all had tended to joy. One must have had more than one bitter experience before one recognises in the smallest mis-

fortune the carrying out of a settled plan . . . . it is the accumulated load that saddens . . . . the occasional hardship, no matter how severe, falling on a robust and healthy state of moral feeling, causes no rankling wound, forms no precedent by which we assure to ourselves future sorrow—in a word, if by repeated shocks our nerve is once lost, we are at the mercy of our troubles and will infallibly be overcome by them. Adam had turned aside, much as though he were anxious to return to his work.

Something of a woman's reticence came to Mignon then, as she choked back her tears and clasped her throat with one little hand as though to keep down the lump that seemed to be there. "I have displeased you," she said, after some moments of struggle with herself; "somehow I seem very often to do so now; and I am sorry, for indeed I would gladly do all that I could for you, who have done so much for me. . . ."

He did not reply. If her own heart did

not suggest to her what she might do to repay him, then he would not tell her; there are some things that a proud man cannot do, and this seemed to him to be one of them.

Shaking her head sorrowfully, she said to herself that he was angry, and she did not wish him to be that; she could not be happy when quarrelling with any one; and then a bright idea came into her head, upon which she immediately proceeded to act.

With a mixture of anxiety and trepidation, she advanced a step or two till she was close to Adam, then said, "Would you—would you like to *kiss* me?"

He turned sharply, saw those dewy lips, so absolutely perfect in form and colour, lifted to his own, lips that well might give

> "afresh
> The life she had so tangled in their mesh,"

and having seen them, turned back silently to his flowers.

He wanted no child's kiss, but a woman's,

passionate and clinging as his own; till he could have that, he would have nothing.

"I am busy," he said; "I have no time for such nonsense," and went on with his work. Mignon watched his moving hands for a moment or so, then she tried again.

"It would not take *long*," she said in a tone of consideration, and still surveying him with anxiety.

Adam turned his head away, on his face that queer contortion that a man's may wear when some irresistibly ludicrous idea obtrudes itself in the midst of stern and serious thought.

"No," he said, "it would not take very long! Still, some other time perhaps, Mignon."

"And you are not cross?" she said, looking relieved, for though she had made the offer in all good faith, she was very glad that it was not accepted.

"Not in the least!"

"*That's* a good job!" she said, heaving a

sigh, "for only just think if we were to go to sleep quarrelling, and one of us died in the night, *how sorry* we should both be when we woke up in the morning, to be sure!"

After which astounding Irishism she went her way, perfectly satisfied with the result of her attempt at peacemaking.

CHAPTER XIV.

"And to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain."

IT was a month since Mr. Montrose, with shorn splendour and abated retinue, had departed with Colin for the Highlands.

Thirty mornings, thirty evenings, thirty noons, had gone by, and the measles still held the day, occasioning as much trouble as if the complaint had been a majestic and dreaded scourge, instead of a trifling, undignified matter, that when mentioned, oftener than not provokes a smile.

With perverse ingenuity each child had

sickened for the complaint a fortnight behind the other, and now that Colin was in the convalescent stage, and Floss just beginning to fall ill, Flora felt it to be something altogether beyond her philosophy that the baby should be chuckling and enjoying jokes all to himself, heartlessly indifferent to the woes of his sister and brethren.

Until this last scion of the house of Dundas had given up being jolly and taken to a hoarse whimper, half strangled in a dry burning throat, abundant sneezing and an irritable disinclination to be looked at, spoken to, or amused by anybody, it was idle to think of making a move for Glen-luce.

"It is enough to drive one crazy!" said Flora almost in tears, as she sank in the softest chair the nursery afforded, and surveying her sick, convalescent, and healthy offspring; "you deserve to be soundly whipped, every one of you, for I feel quite certain that you could *all* have taken it at the same time if you had chosen!"

Taffy, who sat on the floor enjoying a solitary game of marbles, raised his head at this, and looked about him with an air of complacency. *He* had taken it first and done *his* duty, but Colin, who sat up in bed looking rather miserable, and Floss, who lay tossing about restlessly, had not done theirs at all.

"Poor little souls!" said Mignon, who sat by Floss's side; "I don't suppose it is any pleasure to them to be shut up here for a month! Have you written to tell Colin that Floss is ill?"

"He is coming," said Flora carelessly; "I got a telegram from him just now, to say that he would be here late to-night; he only got my letter this morning—it is perfectly ridiculous!"

Mignon knelt down and whispered something to the child, who at intervals moaned "Papa". . . and she sprang up radiant, but the girl softly pressed the little head back upon the pillow and drew the clothes about her shoulders. She had grown quite ex-

perienced in nursing during this past month of illness, and that mother's instinct, which lies dormant in every good and true woman's breast, had awakened in hers. These children had grown to listen for the sound of her footfall as for music, to look for her coming as sunshine, and Flora, who was ill at ease in the sick-room, and indeed more rarely to be found in it than any other room in the house, was glad enough to have Mignon devote herself to the task of tending and amusing them.

"It is always the way," she said, tapping her shapely foot impatiently against the floor; "as sure as ever there is any fun going on in that old barn, I am certain to be away, and of course because Colin has got a few presentable men this year instead of the old frumps he generally brings together, I am planted here dancing attendance on these provoking children! The McCloskys, too, have got a houseful, but by the time I get back all the shooting parties will have broken up, and the glen will have returned to its

usual state of flatness, staleness, and unprofitableness."

"You won't have to stay here so very much longer if baby sickens soon," said Mignon encouragingly, who was tying the ribbons of her cloak preparatory to departure.

"Does he *look* as if he meant to do anything of the kind?" said Flora, surveying her blooming infant with unqualified disapprobation. "No, no! He will wait until Floss is well and then he will make a start, and I dare say October will find me expiating my sins here, without *a soul* to speak to."

And she sailed angrily away. A chorus of small voices was uplifted as Mignon too showed signs of departure.

"You're *coming* back, Auntie?"

"You *never* telled us the end of the 'Free Bears'!"

"Arty *tumming* back?" said Floss in tones of despair, and raising her little flushed face from the pillow.

"Yes, yes," she said, sighing, "I'm coming

back ; and I'll tell you the end of the story, Colin, by-and-by !"

Somebody who was standing on the other side of her own gate, in the act of lifting the latch, saw her coming quietly through the adjoining one, and said to himself that no one would ever believe it possible that she had been something of a hoyden once, or gone riding in a wheel-barrow, so subdued and gentle was she now in all her ways. A step that lagged, a glance but seldom lifted, a voice but rarely heard; were these the tributes paid to him for the care and love with which he had vowed to encompass her ?

Putting out her hand to the latch, she started violently as it touched his, then as he swung the gate back for her to enter, she recovered herself, and made a step or two forward.

" You are going to town ?" she said hesitatingly, as she glanced at the great book under his arm.

"No," he said, "I am going for a walk."

"In such heat as this?" she exclaimed. "Along these dusty roads? You will get a sunstroke!"

"But I am not going along the roads," he said, still holding the gate open. "I am going to a place that you would not believe it possible could be in or near Lilytown."

"Is it a *cool* place?" said Mignon, who had by this time unfurled her umbrella; "is it *green*, and could one get a real breath of good fresh air there, and perhaps see a daisy or two?"

"Yes," he said, showing signs of moving on, "one could do all that. I will show it you some day, and then you can go and sit there, whenever you please, with Prue."

"With Prue!" Somehow the notion of this sylvan retreat in that estimable woman's company did not recommend itself to Mignon's favour.

"Could you not show it me *to-day?*" she said. Then, seemingly alarmed at her own

boldness, added, "I'll promise to be very quiet and not disturb you a bit in your reading, and I've got some work in my pocket—"

"Won't you find it very hot?" he said, wishing with all his heart that he had got away a few moments earlier.

It was no pleasure to him to be with her, to look at her; and if her mood were a kind one, why it tortured him even more than if it were cold.

She saw his hesitation, and with a suddenly heightened colour and trembling lip, walked past him towards the house.

But she had not gone six paces when she was overtaken, and without ceremony made to wheel about, for he had put her hand under his arm, and away they went together, Darby and Joan fashion, each perhaps feeling a little foolish at the unusual propinquity.

She wondered whither he was taking her, as they went along the shady side of the road, and came by-and-by to such a lane as well might pass muster as a country one. It was

one of the least known and frequented alleys that led to the park of the great lady of the neighbourhood, and from whence the general public was rigorously excluded; but Adam being privileged to enter, presently drew a key from his pocket, which he applied to a small door in the stonework of one of the great walls, and Mignon, stepping lightly through the opening, found herself ankle-deep in the verdure of a carpet that the shadows cast by the giant trees around had kept fresh as in early spring-time.

He led her on to where there was a corner whence they could,

> "In deep dell below
> See through the trees a little rivergo
> All in its mid-day gold and glimmering."

"Oh!" said Mignon, clasping her hands, "to think of there being such a place as this, not one mile from Lilytown, and that I should *never* have known of it until summer is gone, and autumn almost here!"

"I did not know of it myself until lately," he said, stretching himself upon the grass and opening his book. "I have only been here three times in my life, including to-day."

Now that he had acceded to her request, and brought her to all that she most particularly desired, coolness, verdure, daisies, even a brook for which she had not bargained, he seemed to consider that she required no farther care from him, and took no heed of her wanderings hither and thither, though indeed, if he forgot all about her, so did she about him, as she pursued her delighted search for such unsatisfactory wild flowers as early September afforded. Dandelions she found in plenty, or rather those downy puff-balls that are steady as rocks when fine weather is assured, but at the slightest sign of approaching rain, fly hither and thither, the sport of every wind that blows.

She discovered a slender Aaron's rod, but feared to approach, much less gather it, since

it was the swaying centre of a swarm of eager bees, who ruthlessly sucked the sweetness from out of its golden blossoms.

After all, she only got some late-tarrying knot-grass, a few flowers of the great scentless bindweed, some ladies'-tresses, a stem of the awkward straggling ragwort, and some nodding Quaker's grass. Looking about her, she fancied that such grass as this might in spring-time grow cowslips, or Paigle, as the country folks to this day call those graceful golden-headed beauties, and hitherto she had believed that *real* cowslips could not be induced to grow within less than twenty miles of London town.

She at last came back to where Adam lay, and sat down a little apart from him, trying to weave her spoils into a nosegay, but they would not be so woven, so at last she laid them down on her lap and took out that everlasting piece of needlework that was as far from being concluded as ever. The pattern was in leaves, and when she had

embroidered one, she laid it down and looked at her husband. He was apparently immersed in his book, his brows were slightly knitted, he had the air of a person struggling with some tough fact or legal problem, and book and effort alike seemed out of place in the soft seductive warmth and splendour of this early September afternoon. *She* could not have learned a lesson to save her life, with those golden motes glancing hither and thither on the page, with an impertinent grasshopper playing at leap-frog over her back, and with the subdued chorus of nature ringing faintly yet sweetly in her ears. Four stone walls would be infinitely more conducive to absorbed study, she felt quite sure.

And he had only to lift his eyes from that dull page to see the great cool sweep of the velvet sward melting into the bracken, where the antlered-heads of the deer glanced in the sunlight. But he saw nothing, not even a rabbit who came peeping out of his hole

and looked at these two quiet people with its dark bright eyes, as though in doubt whether or no they were part of the landscape, then when Adam turned a page, scuttled away in its usual tell-tale fashion.

A sunbeam was playing at hide-and-seek on his hair; it had got to the page—surely he must close the book now? Not a bit of it! He didn't seem to know it was there. An emmet crawled up his hand, then angry at its mistake, stung him; he shook it off, and went on reading as before. A grasshopper, his transparent green body glistening in the sun, weary of every other acrobatic feat, distinguished himself by jumping over his nose, whereat Mignon felt herself rapidly becoming as dangerous as a small boy in church, who, forbidden under awful penalties to laugh, is irresistibly tempted to break into acclamations long and loud.

For there was something about this man that awed her, in spite of herself.

As she looked at him, she found it difficult

to believe that he had ever weeded her gravel walks, or wished her good morning three times running, or called her *miss*, or been anything but masterful and proud and self-contained. . . . and that she had called him to his face a liar, a thief, and a spy; that she had presented him with a jam tart and half a crown, and recommended him to study English history, she never *could* believe. She must have dreamt it all . . . . also that he had said he *loved* her . . . for how was it possible to associate love with anything so indifferent and cold as he?

He had grown much thinner of late, his features were sharp, and the lines about his mouth were firm and closely set, the expression of his face too had altered, the candid, bright look having given place to one that in its hardness sat strangely ill upon him.

It was but rarely that she had a good view of him; in fact she did not remember ever having really studied his face before, though of late she had got into a way of

taking covert peeps at him when she thought herself unobserved.

She fell to studying his face intently, and as he seemed perfectly unconscious of her scrutiny, was withheld by no fears that it might prove disagreeable to him.

She paused and frowned a little over her survey of that feature which is indifferently regarded as a vehicle for the conveyance of smells, good and bad, or as a convenient handle for a saucy fellow who wants to insult you, and made up her mind that it was by no means such a nose as would be likely to belong to a hero of romance, indeed, she and Lu-Lu had both made it a *sine quâ non* in that great unfinished romance of theirs, that the hero, and, for the matter of that, the villain of the story, should possess the most fiercely-aquiline nose ever visible on the face of man. They had selected that type because it was associated in their minds with a haughty and truculent bearing; but it is needless to say that of the science of

nasology they knew nothing, and had by no means learned to regard that feature as the index to character that it is. Of passion and temper it professes no knowledge, but of taste, talent, energy, and the peculiar bent of the mind, it is an infallible guide, and one that may be better trusted than either the eyes or lips.

Who will deny that a paltry-nosed man or woman is usually found to have a corresponding meanness of mind, or that the hitched-up, curled nose of arrogant conceit does not exactly reflect the purse-proud, vulgar spirit within? Or is a woman ever met with, possessing the true celestial nose, who is not endued with an astounding assurance and impudence that makes one wink again with amazement? Napoleon was a firm nasologist, and used to select his men by the size and shape of their noses. "Give me," said he, "a man with a good allowance of nose. Strange as it may appear, when I want any good head-work done, I choose a man—pro-

vided his education has been suitable—with a long nose." Perhaps by a long nose he meant a cogitative one, widening gradually towards the end, this width denoting power of concentrated thought, and habits of close and absorbed meditation.

And this shape, that is neither Roman nor Greek, neither handsome nor unhandsome, and for that very reason did not; on Adam's countenance, find favour in Mignon's eyes, has been shared in common by almost all profound thinkers, or men of especial excellence who have obtained eminence in the widely different departments of war, theology, science and art. Homer, Goethe, Michael Angelo, Galileo, Cromwell, Talleyrand, Usher, and Hume, are a few instances of the famous men in whom the nose cogitative is remarkably apparent.

Finally making up her mind that Adam's nose was too peaceable for a man, Mignon turned her eyes away from him to the green and swelling lines of the beautiful park.

Nevertheless, little madam, had he possessed the Roman or aquiline feature that you consider essential, and with it the selfishness, vigour, sternness and pluck that are almost invariably its attributes, together with a power of subduing all things to himself by sheer will, and an imperious disregard of the likings of all the world, himself included, then it may well have been that he would have brooked none of your fancies and scruples, but have mastered and broken you to his will once and for all, leaving it in your own hands whether you struggled out your life as a slave, or found comfort in your captivity in learning to kiss the rod that chastised you.

Lest, however, we excite laughter where we are fain to evoke admiration, let us not pause to speculate farther as to the possible influence exercised by Adam's nose over his own and Mignon's destiny.

One thing only is certain, that if the time devoted by Mignon that afternoon to the

study of that feature, had been spent in arriving at a better understanding with her husband, then her story would not have been what it was, nor would her adventures ever have been chronicled in these pages.

For though she knew it not, in that hour came to her the golden minute that comes to all, and that decides the weal or woe of almost every human life, came and passed; nor gave one warning whisper that said, "I come . . . I pass . . . . I stand by your side . . . . stretch out your hand and stay me, for to you I come never again . . . ."

Ay, the opportunity had passed, but in vanishing did it not unconsciously sweep some chord in her heart, else why was it that across her memory came straying and fashioning itself in dumb music upon her lips, a verse of that old matchless song, than which there is not one more exquisite written upon the hearts of men?

"Could ye come back to me, Douglas, Douglas,
In the old likeness that I knew,

I could be so loving, so tender and true,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true." . . .

She had heard it drummed out scores and scores of times by the stiff uninformed fingers of her schoolmates, but until this moment the song had held no meaning for her . . . . out of what mystery of sky and earth had it then so suddenly come to her?

"Stretch out your arms to me, Douglas, Douglas!
Drop forgiveness from heaven like dew,
As I lay my heart on your dead heart, Douglas,
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true."

She wondered what the true story of that song was . . . she would like to have some notion of the man's face, the girl's . . . she fancied she could picture both, and she closed her eyes to the smiling landscape so long that Adam, glancing at her at last, thought she had fallen asleep. But when she opened her eyes he seemed just as much absorbed in his book as ever, only he had dropped his pencil, and it now lay on the grass between them.

She stooped forward, picked it up and tried to draw a face on her thumb-nail, school-girl fashion, but lead-pencil and pen and ink are very different matters, and she soon gave up the attempt in disgust. Then a thought seemed to strike her, and diving hopefully into her pocket her face brightened as she found and produced a letter. It was tumbled and rather the worse for wear, but on one side there was no writing, and she was about to commence her portraits on a more satisfactory footing, when something seemed to arouse her attention, and quickly unfolding the paper, her countenance became overspread with one of those painful stinging blushes, that even communicate to the beholder some of their own miserable discomfort.

Adam, apparently unobservant, had been aware of the failure of the thumb-nail portrait, he had seen her produce the letter, but with the extraordinary emotion she displayed, his attention became arrested.

Hitherto, that disease of little minds, suspicion, had found no place in him, but now, aware that there was only one person on earth whose letters could cause her such painful confusion, it occurred to him that this one was probably clandestine, and if so, it behoved him to see it, that she might if possible be saved from the consequences of her own folly.

As he so thought, their eyes met. He imagined that he read defiance in hers, but it really was a species of fear, and fear was to her something strange and new, and accepted by her, as by all young, shy, untried creatures, fiercely. Altogether misunderstanding her glance, he received it as a challenge, and replied to it as such.

As every one knows, when a pitcher is filled to the brim, the slightest touch will cause it to run over. Even so may dissatisfaction accumulate for days, weeks, even months, until the last straw is added, the overtasked strength gives way, and we break

out with a strength and passion that to the offender appears altogether disproportionate to the offence.

Thus Adam was carried away by a greater storm of rage than had ever swayed him, as he said quietly,

"You will let me see that letter?"

She looked at him; but, save that her hand closed more tightly on the paper, she never moved.

"You will give me that letter?" he said, and held out his hand for it.

"And why should I do that?" she said proudly; "it is written not to you, but to me, and it may be that he would not desire that I should give it to you to read . . . ."

When a man of the lower orders is maddened past endurance by the woman who is only a shade less rough and degraded than himself, it is not his wont to punish her with those sarcastic speeches and keen-edged words that are the weapons with which a gentleman stabs the wife or sweetheart who

has angered him; he keeps all *his* witty, eloquent, or cutting speeches in his fists, and informs her with them until he has thoroughly conveyed their various meanings to her mind. The savage instinct that guides the two men is precisely similar; it does but take different forms of expression.

Fortunately for Mignon, this taint of cruelty that is the direct offspring of jealousy, and that debases its origin as much as it outrages its object, was entirely absent in Adam; therefore, exasperated though he was by her last speech, he merely held out his hand for the third time.

"Do not compel me to take it from you," he said.

At that her face flamed up, and with a passionate gesture she flung the letter from her.

It fell almost into his hands; and though he had a mind to compel her to present it in more respectful fashion, he thought he would let her off that time, and proceeded to unfold

the paper. The date was June: it was the love-letter that he himself had stolen and afterwards returned to her.

So she had religiously kept and carried it everywhere with her all these months, she could yet feel so freshly about it as to blush at its mere sight and touch.

"You value this letter?" he said, refolding it, without having read one word of its contents.

"It was my first love-letter," she said, hanging down her head.

"And I deeply regret," he said calmly, "that I should, by marrying you, have deprived you of the pleasure of receiving many more such epistles."

She looked at him in sudden horror; her lips parted, but no sound issued from them.

It had come at last, this thing that she had feared. All along she had been quite sure that he had married her out of kindness, but now he was going to tell her so.

For many past weeks she had felt his con-

stant care and attention to be withdrawn from her, and had grown chill and sad under their bereavement, for not until they had ceased did she discover how sweet and valuable they were to her, or how much her trouble concerning Muriel was soothed by the watchfulness and thought that had hitherto so amply encompassed her.

Well, he had grown weary of doing his duty gracefully, and since he gave her shelter, and food, and clothing, doubtless considered he had done all that was necessary or to be expected of him.

She felt herself turning cold and sick with dread of what his next words would be . . . Yet, after all, it was she who spoke first, not Adam.

"You are sorry," she said, with trembling lips, "that you burdened yourself with me; and I have seen it, oh, yes! I have seen it for a long while past—and—and you cannot be more sorry for it than I am."

They had both risen, her carefully

gathered spoils lay scattered on the ground between them.

"Why did you do it?" she cried, smiting her hands passionately together; "you thought to do a very good and noble thing, but it was a fatal mistake, a mistake that we can never undo, for the longer we live the worse it will grow, and it is a terrible thought that only *death* can stop our being sorry or set us free from one another."

"You are right," he said quietly, "it was a mistake from first to last, and before God I swear that if it were possible I would gladly undo that morning's work; but as it is, and since our hopes of liberation must be far distant, we will try to make the best of a bad business, and go our different ways, neither considering nor thwarting one another. Had you any relative to whose care I might confide you——"

"If only *she* would come," broke in the girl, wringing her hands in a strange piteous agony, "we would go away together, and you

should be troubled with me never any more .... but, oh! it will never be the same, for go where I will I shall be bound to you always, and if it were not for that, how happy we might have been. . . . ."

Unconsciously her hand tightened on the letter that Adam had long ago returned her; and Adam, perceiving that gesture, and believing it to express vehement regret that she was not free to marry the man she loved, felt himself all at once carried away by an impulse of uncontrollable fury, and snatching the letter from her, he tore it into a hundred pieces, ground them beneath his heel, then turned and strode rapidly away, leaving the girl standing in the midst of the soft woodland beauty, with chill and pallid lips, and heart that fluttered awhile with fear, then sank in her breast cold and heavy as any stone.

CHAPTER XV.

"I dare do all that doth become a man;
Who dare do more is none."

IT is a bad thing when a man, sitting soberly down to take count of the failures and successes of his life, is compelled to acknowledge to himself that in his choice of a wife he has made a terrible mistake.

We will suppose that he has not arrived at this conclusion all at once; that he has taken time to consider the matter from every point of view; consequently, that the decision which is arrived at without heat or excitement is presumably a correct one.

There are men who will not acknowledge the false steps they have taken, even to their own hearts; it is intolerable to them to have their lack of shrewdness forced upon them, or to stand convicted of a fatal error of judgment. But Adam was not one of those men, and had a way of facing his difficulties as he went, that, while it required some strength of mind in the present, saved him from much trouble and mortification in the future.

It had been slowly growing upon him for some time past, the consciousness of this mistake of his, but he had not positively made up his mind to it until the morning that followed the walk which had begun with amity and ended in so unseemly an outbreak on his part.

As he sat with folded arms at the table, his eyes fixed on the blank sheet of paper before him, there seemed to pass in array the different events that, one by one, had brought this conviction home to him. There flitted before him a series of *tableaux*, in the first of

which he beheld his hour-old wife pillowing on her breast the head of her unconscious lover, by whose side she was frantically desirous of remaining, even when her husband bade her follow him . . . . the second picture represented the same actors, but this time it was the woman who was unconscious, the man who gazed down upon her distracted by love, disappointment, and despair . . . . anon the scene changed, and the gazer saw a slim young girl, who, with clasped hands and a passion of earnestness in her blue eyes, asked, "Do you think we shall ever see *him* again?" And there yet rang in his ears the question put by her to Prue on a subsequent occasion, "If one got married at all, might it not be better to marry somebody that one *loved?*"

And lastly, and freshest of all in his mind, since he had beheld it but yesterday, he saw the same girl sitting on the grass with her lap half full of wild flowers, and in her hand a letter, fondly hoarded, closely cherished, while

guilty blushes painted her cheeks, and angry defiance flashed from her eyes. Here the series ended; but doubtless there were plenty more in store for him, in which he would cut the same sorry, despicable figure that it had been his lot to do since his marriage.

The contemptible position he filled was becoming absolutely intolerable to him. Once or twice lately he had said to himself that he would throw the whole thing up and go away; then the thought that by so doing he acknowledged himself beaten, acknowledged that the task he had set himself was one that he had neither skill nor strength to perform, stepped in and held him back. What! abandon with such haste a pursuit to which he had sworn to devote every energy he possessed, to which he had vowed to bring the most entire love, the most inexhaustible patience, and the practice of every delicate and gentle art that would be likely to woo the heart out of a woman's breast? Well, there are some things a proud man cannot do, there are posi-

tions that a man of self-respect cannot be expected to fill, and he was growing weary of striving to wear his cap and bells gracefully, and while he would have moved heaven and earth to win her when he believed that her love was a treasure no man had yet won, the same efforts went terribly against the grain with him now that he thought he possessed damning evidence of her passion for Philip La Mert.

There is an enormous difference in men's fashion of loving. Some are better lovers when piqued and provoked by women; provocation attracts, and contradiction fixes them; they are indeed only satisfactory and agreeable as lovers so long as they are kept hungry. But where a man is thorough, and demands an undivided love, moreover, having that within him which makes satiety impossible to him, then he will be satisfied with no half-gift, and if he is not able to possess that which he covets in its integrity, he will reject it altogether.

Adam was one of these men, and he said to himself that he would no longer seek to bring back her wandering allegiance ; nay, a something stiff and hard within him rose up, and rebelled against the constant repulses he had met, and, alas! he was beginning to pass from the healthy, if tormenting, stage of suffering, to the torpid disease of indifference. He found himself contemplating the possibility of her fancy for Philip fading away, to be gradually replaced by a liking for himself (for girls are heedless creatures, and apt to confound their fancies and their hearts) with positive aversion.

And the bitterest part of the whole thing was, that the fault lay with himself.

He had not behaved fairly towards her ; he had been absolutely dishonest in the advantage he had taken of her youth and inexperience. He should have waited, should have given her time to learn her own mind before, instead of after, her marriage, have won or lost her in fair fight; instead of which

he had hurried her, and, now that she had grown more wise, she despised him for it.

It had begun badly . . . . it had ended worse. The deception he had practised on her was bringing forth bitter fruit, and though good might at first have appeared to come out of evil, it was not really so. No edifice, however stately, can rest securely on a shifting foundation.

If it were not for the belief he entertained that Philip was the destroyer of Muriel (although of this he had no proof, and might be altogether mistaken), he thought it might have been better that Mignon should have married him, for of this man's love for her there could be no doubt, and he had grown weary of wickedness, and influenced by her, might have led a better life, especially as she . . . . loved him——

"Why, man alive!" said Colin, entering suddenly, "what on earth is the matter? Have you got a murder on your mind, or are you only meditating one?"

Adam's brow relaxed, his clenched hand straightened itself; but none the less honest Colin, as he sat down opposite his brother-in-law, shook his head with very real concern.

"You're all wrong, old fellow," he said—"look as if you meant going in for a fever, or something of that sort. What you really want is your feet on the stubble, and your favourite gun in your hand. It's your Highland air you're pining for, and it's my belief you'll be no better till you've got it."

"That is out of the question," said Adam, rising and going to the window. "You see I've work to do, and——"

"Ah, yes—well—too much work is bad for you," here he looked keenly at Adam, then shook his head again, unobserved by the other,—"and you're not used to it, and —and we miss you awfully at Glen-luce; even your governor seems really vexed you're not there—and we have a very pleasant party of fellows; Phillis, too, is holding a small court, and I've never known the place more jolly.

Come back with me to-morrow, stop a fortnight, and then return to your work, freshened up and better in every way."

"I can't leave my wife here alone," said Adam, but with a momentary hesitation in his tone that Colin instantly detected.

"What harm can she possibly come to?" said Colin quickly. "She is at our place from morning till night with the children; and I should think Prue would be a perfect dragon where she is concerned; and—you won't think me intrusive or taking a liberty, old fellow, but women are sometimes best left to themselves for a bit—they're full of fancies, poor souls, and often don't know what they want, or what is good for them, and——"

Here his flounderings came to an end, and Adam, turning from the window, in spite of himself, burst out laughing.

"All right, old man," he said; "I'll think it over, and let you know this evening. How's Floss?"

"Not particularly bright, poor little soul. And don't *think* about coming, but come," he added, as he took his departure.

After all, thought Adam, he had a great mind to go . . . . At that moment the temptation to get clear away from the carking worries that embittered his life, was wellnigh irresistible.

And of late he had been suffering from a species of nostalgia, both his waking and dreaming thoughts being full of Strathsaye, for his love for his Highland home was very great. An intense longing was upon him for a great free breath of air on his own hills, for the pleasant stir and bustle of his favourite sport; above all, for a complete change of air, scene, and companionship, that would restore the tone to his nerves, and shake the cobwebs from his weary brain.

And then, having almost decided that he would go, the thought of leaving Mignon entirely alone, and with no better guardians than Flora and Prue, caused him to ask him-

self if he were mad to think of thus abandoning her?

Philip La Mert might appear upon the scene, although that was scarcely probable, as only a week ago had he seen an announcement in some paper of the departure of that gentleman for the Continent; or Flora might, by hook or crook, obtain the society of one or another of those objectionable friends in whom her soul delighted; or bad news might come to Mignon of her sister, and there would be nobody by to soften the blow to her. And yet these objections rose one by one, simply to be demolished. Of evil intent to Mignon, Adam firmly believed Philip to be guiltless, and for many reasons it was improbable that he should desire to place himself in her way. As to Flora's acquaintances, she would find it a difficult matter to discover one within fifty miles of London town; and as to Muriel, he had his own reasons for believing that she was not to approach Mignon.

"Our first and third thoughts," says Dugald Stewart, "will be found to coincide."

It was in accordance with this theory that Adam presently rang the bell, sent for Prue, and desired her to have everything in readiness for his departure early the following morning.

Returning to her mistress and acquainting her with the orders just given, that young lady received the intelligence without uttering a single word.

* * * * *

In the dead of the night Adam suddenly awoke with a start, and a conviction that something unusual had just happened, or was happening. Had he heard the touch of a hand upon his door, or the sound of a footfall on the gravel without, or did some voice call upon him in that urgent imperative whisper that suffices to awaken the deepest sleeper? He could not tell.

Springing from his bed he went to the

open window and looked abroad. He could just make out the outlines of the trees and bushes; but in the garden nothing stirred, and the midnight silence was intense and unbroken. And yet he was certain that the sound by which he had been awakened was an unusual one. There is within us some vigilant quality that is only exercised when every other faculty is at rest, that permits all ordinary sounds to pass unheeded while we sleep, but that instantly sounds the alarum when anything unusual or fraught with danger to us is at hand; and Adam never doubted that he had been awakened by some cause that it behoved him to at once ascertain.

He hastily threw on some clothes, and softly unlatching his door, went out into the passage, which was in total darkness. Noiselessly proceeding along it, he came to Mignon's door, and with a start of fear, found that it was a little way open, usually it was closely shut.

Was she walking in her sleep, and, possessed by the thought of Muriel even in her dreams, had she wandered out of her room into the garden or road in search of her?

He hesitated a moment, pushed the door open, and entered. His heart was beating violently; he could have faced the most frightful danger with a cooler hand, a steadier pulse than he now boasted; the ugly feelings of the assassin or the thief seemed to be upon him as he advanced to the centre of the apartment and looked around him. Then, as he looked, he forgot himself in a keen sensation of relief. Whatever the sound might have been that awakened him, it was not caused by Mignon, who lay asleep on the bed, her face disclosed by the subdued light of a taper that burned on a little table by her side.

She was there, Adam had no occasion for uneasiness concerning her; having assured himself therefore of the fact of her safety,

why did he not retire as noiselessly as he had entered?

Instead of which he stood, his feet rooted to the ground, absolutely without power to move, and had she opened her eyes at that moment he could not have made good his escape; his whole being was merged in the rapture, the luxury of regarding her . . . .

> "sideways *her* face reposed
> On one white arm, and tenderly unclosed
> By tenderest pressure a faint damask mouth,
> To slumbering pout; just as the morning south
> Disparts a dew-lipped rose . . . ."

He had said to himself that very morning that he did not love her, nay, that he would not have her love if he could . . . . but to-night the veil of deceit fell from his heart, and he knew that the choicest good that earth contained for him was bound up in that lovely, sleeping maiden yonder . . . . How young she looked, how innocent! no more than a child that has fallen asleep with a smile on its lips, and not a care or a thought for the morrow . . . . He crept a pace or

two nearer, nearer yet, knelt beside her, then saw with a pang how dark were the shadows under her eyes, how thin the little hand had grown, that slender blue-veined hand, with its mockery of a circlet shining upon it!

It was so near to him that his moustache actually brushed it, and as he looked, carried away by a wild, uncontrollable longing, he set his lips against it with a touch no rougher than that of a feather might be; but light as it was, the touch sufficed to scatter her dreams, to unseal her blue eyes, and as, half-waking, she stretched out her white arms towards him, he fell face downwards on the ground, lying hidden in the shadow of the bed. "*Muriel!*" she murmured, "*Muriel!*" then sighing, she sank into slumber again:

> "Self-folding, like a flower
> That faints into itself at evening hour."

* * * * *

At the same moment that Mignon in her

sleep uttered her sister's name, a woman who stood without in the garden, her face turned upwards to the window in which the faint light shone, stretched out her yearning arms towards the unconscious girl.

"Thou art safe, my beloved," she whispered, ". . . . in the keeping art thou of one who loves and will guard thee . . . . safe" . . . . She bowed her head upon her hands, shaken by an agony of longing, then stretched out her arms again, crying, "if I might come to thee—my heart . . . . my heart . . . . if I might come to thee . . . . but to me . . . . to me . . . ." she shuddered, drew her cloak more closely about her, as though the night winds chilled her to the bone, then with a last look upwards, and a voiceless prayer, faded away in the half-light like a shadow.

Thus, love's vigil kept over her from within, from without, Mignon slept, and they who watched knew not how powerless was the love of either to shield her from the fate that

was creeping upon her, nor guessed that never had she stood in peril so dire as that which menaced her now.

Could Adam have known, could he have foreseen the future, he would have gathered her there and then to his breast, he would have braved her dislike, even her loathing, rather than have left her exposed to the fearful risks she afterwards ran; aye, he would have forfeited the chance of that voluntary relinquishment of herself to him, that he had all along vowed to be the only gift from her that could perfectly satisfy and content him.

A little longer therefore he knelt beside her; then, lifting one of those long bright tresses that flooded all the pillow with their sunshine, to his lips, he rose and went quietly away. So, in the time to come, he saw her always, a child with the innocence of childhood on brow and lip; nor could he ever picture her as any other than she looked that night, not even when he knew that he ought

to think of her with the brand of shame upon her brow; nay, this presentment of her as she had been, was afterwards to come between him and the likeness of her as she was, so that he should know not her features, nor recognise in the outcast, the beautiful little child-wife that he had so madly loved.

END OF VOL. II.

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